


To: Town of Rhinebeck Town Board Members

From: James Levy, AICP (on behalf of the Town of Rhinebeck Planning Board) 

Re: Workforce Housing Proposal Referral – “The Hamlet”

Date: July 6, 2022

The Town of Rhinebeck Planning Board, upon referral from the Town of Rhinebeck Town Board, discussed the “The Hamlet” project proposal utilizing the WF-H and other Zoning Code regulations at the May 16th, June 6th, June 20th, and July 5th meetings and developed a list of comments and a recommendation for the Town Board’s consideration.

Referral Recommendation:

The Planning Board has come to general consensus on the project, as submitted for review, and voted to forward the following recommendation:

While the Town of Rhinebeck Planning Board supports Workforce Housing in the Town, specific issues related to the project on the proposed parcel have raised concerns that the project is not appropriate for the site. Therefore, the Planning Board recommends rejection of the project application, as submitted for review, due to the factors noted in this memo.

The following comments are submitted by the Town of Rhinebeck Planning Board for consideration by the Town Board during review of “The Hamlet.” We have organized comments in this memo into categories which are not in any particular order of importance or priority.

Existing Conditions:

The proposed building site is seriously compromised by the steep slopes that run north to south through the property. The applicant has said that retaining walls will be needed on the east side of the four proposed buildings. Assuming families with children will be moving into these apartments, the terrain and retaining walls could present hazards for young children playing outdoors. This also raises the question of the ability to provide adequate outdoor recreational facilities for both children and adults on this site.

Visit the workforce housing site, if you have not already done so. (Maybe the Highway Department can bushhog a route through the woods and/or use a small excavator to remove fallen logs from a path). This would provide a first-hand understanding of the limitations the heavily sloped terrain imposes for:

- Siting buildings and parking areas
- Providing safe access to roads
- Providing useable outdoor recreation space for tenants

There are some nice stone walls along the western edge of the property, and it would be ideal to retain those.

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The site is very uneven, sloped with a significant drop-off on the western edge. There might be some good sledding at times, but the prospect of using the western side of the property as an amenity for the residents is unlikely.

The site is heavily forested and will require a lot of tree cutting and the loss of a lot of understory. At present this site serves as a woodland buffer between the developed village and the open expanses occupied by The Gardens. Apart from the specific issues involving any habitat that is included in or directly impacted by the development within the boundaries of this lot, some thought needs to be given to the more general impact this development will have to the overall balance of development in this town and especially within the LWRP. We need to keep a check on sprawl.

Dutchess County Parcel Access shows this tax lot as being both inside and outside the Village, but the plans seem to indicate development only on the Town side of the lot. Why is that?

Access – Ingress/Egress & Connectivity

The applicant is proposing 2 access points, one via the driveway into the Wells Manor housing facility, Wells Manor Lane, which discharges onto Astor Drive. The second is to access from Route 308.

- a. Access from Wells Manor Lane. Wells Manor is an affordable housing facility for senior citizens. As a private road, it was not designed as a through road or to handle traffic volume beyond that of the senior citizen housing facility. Accessing an 80 unit apartment complex from a private road would be likely to create hazards for pedestrians using Well Manor Lane to access the village. Since it empties onto Astor Drive, a narrow Village/Town road, traffic volume could overwhelm the safe carrying capacity of Astor Drive. For housing developments on the scale of what the applicant is proposing, access should only be from a County of state highway.
- b. Access to Route 308. Access from Route 308 is characterized by terrain and sight line limitations. Coming west from the Village, traffic descends steeply downhill and through a sharp left hand turn with a speed limit of 45 miles per hour, all of which contribute to a potential safety hazard for both those traveling on 308 and those either entering or leaving the proposed housing facility.

This plan would be much improved if there were some provision for a sidewalk or cycle path leading to the Village. Perhaps this could be accomplished by the applicant obtaining easements from neighboring properties (Wells Manor, Village Green, The Woods) who might want to participate in making walkable/ bikeable connections to the village. This would also help diminish the impact of car traffic into and out of this site.

One of the impediments to developing a pedestrian/bicycle path to the train station from the Village is at the point where West Market crosses the Rhinebeck Kill. This bridge is between the Town Highway Garage and the SW corner of this proposed development lot. Is there any way to condition the approval of this development with the provision of a footbridge crossing the kill, or the widening of the existing bridge? Does the town (or Village, for that matter) have any leverage in enticing the applicant to engage in measures on the fringes of their property?

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Full disclosure, I am a Trustee of the Starr Library. The library as well as the Town Pool, playground, playing fields, community garden and nature trails are all important features of town life and this development is right across the street from them. I can only imagine the residents of this development piling into their cars and driving over to the TTSM Park, even though it's just across the street! I myself would be cautious riding my bike out onto West Market from this development with cars blaring over that blind hill (& I used to be a bike messenger). There ought to be a safe and sure way to access town amenities without pushing your baby stroller into the dangerous road.

Where would the school bus stop? It would be really bad to have the bus stop on the busy road over a blind hill and make children scramble across where people rush to catch the train. It's also going to be a real trudge from the middle of the site where the buildings are, out to the main street where the bus stops (particularly in winter), unless there's a two-way through street and the bus can travel end to end. Evaluate the threats to safety posed by access to Rhinecliff Road and Wells Manor Lane from a large development on the proposed site, and require that safe access be deemed possible before proceeding with any further review.

Site Layout & Design

There could be a better understanding of what is possible in affordable housing design. A comprehensive review of what is being done around the country and the world to construct attractive, livable, affordable housing, including recent innovations in design and materials. Additionally, there aren't any guidelines for the design and siting of affordable housing in Rhinebeck. Special use permit guidelines that establish design requirements for affordable housing will help shape developments that are appropriate for the Town and allow a normal approval process through the Planning Board.

The Town's zoning law, in Article VIII, *Neighborhood Design Standards and Guidelines*, outlines the expectations for any residential development adjacent to the Village: “The intent of this article is to encourage and implement the Town of Rhinebeck's Comprehensive Plan smart growth policies by establishing standards and guidelines for creating compact walkable residential neighborhoods near the Village of Rhinebeck.” In Section 125-64.1, *Town Design Standards*, we have: Any use established through the subdivision, site plan, special permit and other approval process set forth within this chapter, or maintained in conformance with this chapter, shall comply to the extent practicable with the Town of Rhinebeck Design Standards as determined by the Planning Board during the Board's review of the particular application within that application's environmental context.” The plans submitted for this project show a row of two storytwo-story buildings fronting on a 100+ car parking lot, which taken together resemble a strip mall rather than a ‘compact walkable residential neighborhood’. There is no suggestion in these plans that the guidance of Article VIII or Section 125-64.1, found in our zoning law, was followed in developing these plans.

Workforce housing is desperately needed in this town, but is *'exactly here'* a suitable location?

Visit a representative sample of Kearney developments, if you have not already done so.

- In particular, examine the differences between “loft” and “residential building” apartments, as well as between workforce/affordable, middle income, and market rate apartments.

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- Some elements Kearney has used elsewhere might be desirable for the Rhinebeck project: simple, more authentic exterior design, high ceilings, oversize windows, etc.

Consider ways to make the development proposed for Rhinebeck more compatible with the Town’s character and the neighborhood, and a more pleasurable home for tenants. **This might require a reduction in the number of units and a change in the mix of tenant incomes to provide the project income needed to improve the development.** For example, the number of “workforce” tenants might be reduced and some middle income and market rate tenants added. (The rental housing market for all of these income groups is very tight in Rhinebeck.)

Possible project design strategies:

1. Reduce the length of buildings. The proposed project has extremely long structures that evoke a “Motel 6” or “strip mall” aesthetic. The length of the buildings could be reduced by reducing the number of units in each building. One of the Kearney developments, *The Woods at Pawling* (photo below), is an example of a development with 80 units constructed in five rather than four buildings, reducing the length of the buildings. Presumably, each of these buildings contain about 16 apartments instead of the 20 apartments proposed for the Rhinebeck project. **Building length for the Rhinebeck project could be further reduced if each structure contained 12 apartments.**



The Woods at Pawling

Provide greater separation between buildings, possibly in two rows, rather than one, retaining some of the existing trees between buildings.

2. Divide parking into multiple, separate lots, well screened by trees and other landscaping.
3. Improve building facades by eliminating artificial elements such as false shed dormers and colonial columns.
4. If the length of buildings was reduced, the colonial columns and artificial roof dormers stripped from the facade, and the roof made steeper, the rectangular structure that would remain is reminiscent of a large, long barn – an example of iconic NewEngland architecture.



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- If fewer, but larger windows were used, as in some of the Kearney “loft” developments, these “barn lofts” could be attractive structures, with the “feeling” of the renovated barn below, although obviously they would be larger/longer, with more regular windows.



Project Identification/Naming Convention

If the project goes ahead, consider a name change for the development. Rhinecliff is the historic hamlet in Rhinebeck. A name such as “The Hamlet at Rhinebeck” for a new development would detract from the historic importance of Rhinecliff and would be confusing. I rather like “The Barn Lofts at Rhinebeck” myself.

I find the use of the name, "The Hamlet" kind of off-putting and disingenuous. We have a hamlet in this town. It's called Rhinecliff. I suppose we can put up with the working title for this project so long as we are determining if it will be or not be, but I would like to not undercut the value of our authentic hamlet with the title of this development.

Workforce Housing Objectives

Section 125-63, *Affordable Housing*, establishes the standards and guidelines for developing and administering affordable housing opportunities in the Town. In particular, Section 125-63.I.3, *Determining eligibility of affordable housing applicants*, establishes a point system for determining eligibility for available affordable housing units. Are the guidelines found in Section 125-63.I.3 part of the current application? If not, who is responsible for determining eligibility? The Purpose and intent of Section 125-63 includes the statement: “The Town recognizes that individuals with low and moderate incomes, who work in the Town and/or provide volunteer services to the Town, should have opportunities to find housing that is affordable to them within the Town.” Section 125-63.I.3 reflects this objective. Does the business model/management plan for this proposed development meet this specific objective?

Public Outreach and Engagement:

We haven’t effectively communicated the need for and benefits of affordable housing to Rhinebeck’s residents or given them a chance to participate in shaping guidelines for it. Affordable housing would help Rhinebeck’s lower wage earners, such as hospital staff, live closer to work, and would provide a wider hiring pool for local businesses. But it also would have other important benefits: 1) The children of long time Rhinebeck residents could afford to live in town. 2) Studies show that increasing density in or near villages and town centers revitalizes them and keeps them healthy during economic slumps. 3) The larger, concentrated customer base supports the kind of village stores that supply the everyday products residents

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need. 4) And, importantly for Rhinebeck, lower cost housing (with high-speed internet) attracts young professionals and artists who can contribute energy, creativity and innovation to a town with an aging population.

Comments from the Town Planning Consultant

- There is uncertainty regarding the ingress/egress locations and requirements of NYSDOT. We believe, and a law was just adopted by the Town Board, that traffic should take access from the highest classification road if feasible, reasonable and safe in terms of ingress and egress. Emergency access, school bus access, and non-vehicular connectivity are all items that should be considered as part of a holistic approach to transportation for this site. With such close proximity to the Village, library, Town Park and on what may eventually become a trail connection to Rhinecliff, these issues are all relevant and important to consider.
 - o Based on past discussions, there is a potential to create a connection between this property and the adjacent property where trails are proposed by the Winnakee Land Trust. If this potential exists, it would be a very positive connection to make and we would encourage such a connection.
 - o We believe that safety concerns related to the proposed/potential Rhinecliff Road access point may possibly be mitigated by considering the potential to connect the project to the existing Town Highway Garage and the associated existing curb cut on Rhinecliff Road. The existing access has better sight lines than the location proposed by the applicant and is an existing connection. That said, it is not necessarily an easy connection to make as it may impact wetlands, would require assessing the needs of both uses, which aren't necessarily complimentary, and requires designing an entrance that works for both uses simultaneously. It would also likely create a more visible driveway on the WF-H parcel (looking north/east), but we are confident that an engineering solution could be identified. There are always trade-offs that need to be weighed as part of any application and this potential option would certainly require weighing trade-offs.

The ingress/egress access issue is a major item that the Town, applicant and NYSDOT must come to agreement on for this project to proceed. This is probably *the* primary issue to address before proceeding further with other proposal issues, items and concerns.

- The project encroaches into a wetland on the northern end of the project. A wetland permit will be required in addition to the required Site Plan. We don't believe a wetland permit application has been submitted.
- Comments from the Town Consulting Engineer on this project should be reviewed and assessed.

References - List and Description of Kearney Developments

Beacon

- **West End Lofts:** flat roofed, commercial-look building; 96 units: 50 affordable artist lofts, 21 middle income units, 25 market rate units. Lofts have 12 ft ceilings, 8 ft high windows
- **West End Lofts II:** 25 market rate units; building similar to phase I, above. Units described as “spacious,” may be larger than affordable units with in-unit laundry

Hopewell Junction

- **Mews at Hopewell Junction:** Two facing, very long buildings designed to look like row houses; 89 units of affordable and supportive housing.

Liberty

- **Chestnut Street Apartments:** 72 units of supportive and workforce housing in two buildings.

Lockport

- **Harrison Lofts,** rehab of industrial building, large central atrium, commercial and residential

Oneonta

- **Dietz Street Lofts,** flat roofed, commercial look buildings; mixed use, mixed income, 64 units, some reserved for “artist” tenants

Peekskill

- **Lofts on Main:** flat roofed, commercial-look building with 72 loft units: 50 affordable, 22 middle-income plus 4 commercial storefronts, 16 ft ceilings, 12 ft high windows

Pawling

- **The Hamlet at Pawling:** 80 affordable senior units with balconies, plus 8 that utilize special nursing assistance
- **The Woods at Pawling:** 80 mixed income units in five buildings

Poughkeepsie

- **Crannel Square:** Mixed income, flat roofed, commercial look, 16 ft ceilings, oversized windows
- **Queen City Lofts:** large, flat roofed, commercial-look building, 70 mixed use, mixed-income and artist units, 16 ft ceilings, 12 ft high windows
- **Highridge Gardens:** Three story residential buildings with 24 workforce units and 50 congregate supportive units

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- **Poughkeepsie Commons:** Buildings appear identical to Highridge Gardens, above; 48 affordable senior units, 24 units for disabled veterans
- **Pendell Commons:** Two and three story residential buildings with balconies; 24 affordable senior units, 48 workforce units

Red Hook

- **Red Hook Commons Phase I:** Three story residential building(s) with balconies; senior, commercial and market rate units
- **Red Hook Commons Phase II:** Appears identical to phase I

Rome

- **Copper City Lofts:** Flat roofed, commercial-look block of attached buildings, mixed use, mixed income, artist housing

Somers

- **The Mews at Baldwin Place:** 72 affordable senior units with balconies in attached buildings sited in a U configuration
- **The Mews II at Baldwin Place:** affordable senior housing similar to phase I, above
- **Hidden Meadows:** Market rate townhouses with garages; buildings less long with a cleaner façade
- **Crossroads Plaza:** Large commercial building with retail and office units
- **Crossroads at Baldwin Place:** 119 units with small balconies; senior/55+/mixed income housing plus 2 market rate apartments

Yorktown

- **Wynwood Oaks:** 80 affordable senior units with balconies