



Oct. 4, 2021

By Email: zba@town.arlington.ma.us

Re: Thorndike Place

Dear Members of the Arlington Zoning Board of Appeals,

In view of recent project design changes and other developments in the Thorndike Place hearing, the Mystic River Watershed Association (MyRWA) wishes to supplement its October 19, 2020 comments with the following.

First, we acknowledge that the Applicant has made some significant changes to its development proposal, in a good-faith effort to address local needs, which reduce the scale of the project somewhat and may incrementally lessen its environmental impact. It appears that the revised design would not further impinge on wetlands buffer zones. We also commend the Applicant for agreeing to provide 2:1 compensatory flood storage and making other accommodations to local environmental concerns.

That being said, MyRWA remains concerned that the scale of this project may be too large for the site, given its ecological importance, the history of local flooding, and the imminent but uncertain impacts of climate change. In particular, MyRWA believes that the data on existing conditions (notably, seasonal high ground water elevations) are as yet inadequate to allow the Board to conclude that the project is consistent with local needs.

The expert discussion, during the course of the hearing, reveals a dangerous gap between the regulatory performance standards now applicable to this project and what, in hindsight, may prove to have been necessary to protect the occupants, the neighborhood, and this priceless resource (a vestige of the Great Swamp) from avoidable harm. Clearly, the legitimate fears of local residents about potential exacerbation of flood risk have not been allayed.

On balance, based on what we now know and do not know, we think that local needs are best served by application of the precautionary principle, and that this project creates unacceptable environmental risk.

Should the Board wish to proceed with the consideration of proposed permit conditions, we suggest that it ask the Applicant to agree to a further extension of the hearing period to facilitate meaningful public comment and Board deliberation. The project design and concomitant engineering reports have been in such a state of flux that it has been difficult for members of the public (if not the Board) to discern which of the technical issues have been adequately addressed by project design changes and which remain to be addressed in permit conditions. Furthermore, the revised draft decision, only recently made available, does not

clearly show what changes to the prior draft decision are under consideration or why. For the public to assist the Board in making the best decision possible, and to instill greater public confidence in the process, it would help to have more time to consider the details of the Board's proposed action.

If the Board does proceed to issue a comprehensive permit, we urge it to attach conditions that are as protective as possible, within the limits of economic feasibility, and to support such conditions with plenary findings. To that end, we recommend (at a minimum) that the Board include: (a) the condition proposed by the Arlington Conservation Commission, regarding groundwater elevation item #13, on page 2 of its letter to the Board dated August 13, 2021; and (b) an appropriate condition ensuring that the proposed rain garden will function as intended. In addition, we recommend that the Board include in its findings the language that Brian Rehrig has submitted in regard to flooding and open space needs. We would also direct the Board's attention to the comments submitted by Bill Fuchs (a MyRWA Policy Committee member) on invasive plant management, dated April 8, 2021.

Finally, we strongly believe that any development of the 5.6 acre project site must be balanced by the Applicant's dedication of the remaining 12 acres of open space to conservation purposes, together with adequate funding for cleanup of that parcel and the restoration of soils and native vegetation. We are disappointed that this essential feature of the Applicant's plan for the property remains inchoate, and we suggest that the Applicant and the Board extend the hearing until the proposed disposition of the conservation parcel has been clarified and a memorandum of understanding between the Applicant and the Town has been finalized.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patrick M. Herron". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Patrick Herron
Executive Director