



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Executive Office of Environmental Affairs

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January 6, 2005

CERTIFICATE OF THE SECRETARY OF ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS ON THE NOTICE OF PROJECT CHANGE

PROJECT NAME	: Granite Hill Residential Subdivision
PROJECT MUNICIPALITY	: Northbridge
PROJECT WATERSHED	: Blackstone
EOEA NUMBER	: 13322
PROJECT PROPONENT	: Granite Hill Development Corp.
DATE NOTICED IN MONITOR	: December 7, 2005

Pursuant to the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (G.L. c. 30, ss. 61-62H) and Section 11.10 of the MEPA regulations (301 CMR 11.00), I have reviewed the Notice of Project Change (NPC) submitted on this project and hereby determine that it **no longer requires** the preparation of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR).

The project originally underwent MEPA review in August, 2004, and consisted of a 156-unit residential condominium development on a 54-acre parcel off Rumonoski Drive and Highland Street in Northbridge. When proposed the project was under Chapter 40B of the laws of the Commonwealth, and a MassHousing Project Eligibility application had been filed. The eligibility determination had not yet been issued, and the local permitting process had not yet begun. Thirteen 3-story 12-unit buildings with a mix of two and three bedroom single-floor flats averaging 1,350 square feet were proposed, along with 142 surface parking spaces and 104 underground spaces. Of these thirty-nine affordable units were planned, with the remainder to be sold at market rates. Access to the development was planned via Rumonoski Drive to Highland Street.

The project is subject to environmental review pursuant to Section 11.03 (5) (b) 3. c. because it involves the construction of ½ or more miles of new sewer mains not in the right-of-way of existing streets, and requires a Sewer Extension Permit and 401 Water Quality Certification from the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). It may need a Conservation Permit from the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP). At the time of the Environmental Notification Form (ENF), the proponent was seeking a Comprehensive Permit from the Town of Northbridge.

The Certificate issued on August 30, 2004 required the preparation of an EIR to address concerns with land alteration, rare species, wetlands, drainage, water quality, traffic, wastewater, and historic and archaeological resources. At the time the project potentially required approval from the state Housing Appeals Committee (HAC) if the Comprehensive Permit was appealed. Because of the potential HAC review, MEPA jurisdiction was broad, and extended to all aspects of the project with the potential for significant environmental impact. However, the project is now under the Town of Northbridge bylaw and is no longer under Chapter 40B of the laws of the Commonwealth. The project change also proposes to reduce the number of housing units from 156 to 97, change the type of housing to age restricted 55+ condominiums, and a to redesign access to the development direct from Highland Street.

This Certificate presumes that the project will create less than 10 acres of impervious area. The impervious area has increased from 4.9 acres, as originally proposed in August 2004, to 8.1 acres of impervious with this new project change. If the redevelopment project exceeds the 10-acre threshold, I will require the proponent to file a timely Notice of Project Change that discloses the extent of impacts, and details the proponent's strategy to avoid, minimize, or mitigate those impacts.

Although the project no longer requires the preparation of an EIR, the proponent must consult with the Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP) to address the impacts to rare species, as described in the comments from NHESP. The proponent has not provided enough information to NHESP to determine whether or not the rare plant survey for the state-listed rare plant species, the Variable Sedge, was conducted in accordance with protocols approved by NHESP. The proponent should provide NHESP with:

1. A complete list of the vascular plants observed during the rare plant survey;
2. An overall description of the natural communities and ecosystems encountered during the survey; and
3. A citation of references and/or herbaria utilized and any other resources used in the identification and overall investigation.

The proposed project changes have reduced the scope of the project, and reduced the potential impacts of the project. I find that the potential impacts of the project no longer warrant the preparation of an EIR. The proponent can resolve any remaining issues during the permitting process.

January 6, 2006

Date


Stephen R. Pritchard

Comments received:

12/28/05 Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program

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