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May 22, 2009

CERTIFICATE OF THE SECRETARY OF ENERGY AND 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 : April 22, 2009

Pursuant to the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (G. L. c. 30, ss. 61-62I) 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 determine that it **does not require** further MEPA review.

Project History

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. At that time, the project was proposed to be constructed under Chapter 40B of the General 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 apartments 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 was originally subject to environmental review pursuant to Section 11.03 (5) (b)(3)(c) of the MEPA regulations because it involved the construction of ½ or more miles of new sewer mains not in the right-of-way of existing streets, and required a Sewer Extension Permit and 401 Water Quality Certification from the Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP). It also required 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 Secretary's Certificate issued on August 30, 2004 required the preparation of a discretionary 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.

In December, 2005 a NPC containing information about the scoped topics from the 2004 Certificate was submitted. The NPC also stated that the project was planned to be constructed under the Town of Northbridge bylaw and no longer under Chapter 40B. The project change also proposed to reduce the number of housing units from 156 to 97, change the type of housing to age restricted 55+ senior housing condominiums, and a to redesign access to the development directly from Highland Street. On January 6, 2006, it was determined that the NPC submitted on the proposed project did not require the preparation of an Environmental Impact Report.

The January, 2006 Certificate on the NPC presumed that the project would create less than 10 acres of impervious area. The impervious area had increased from 4.9 acres, as originally proposed in August 2004, to 8.1 acres of impervious with the project change. The Certificate indicated that if the redevelopment project changed, an NPC would be required that disclosed the extent of impacts, and details the proponent's strategy to avoid, minimize, or mitigate those impacts.

2nd Project Change Description

The revised project is now planned to consist of a 124 unit residential condominium affordable housing development under Chapter 40B on approximately 39 acres of land located off of Highland Street in Northbridge. The project now requires a Comprehensive Permit from the Town, potential approval from the state Housing Appeals Committee based on a potential appeal of the Comprehensive Permit, an Order of Conditions from the Northbridge Conservation Commission, and, on appeal only, a Superceding Order of Conditions from MassDEP. The project may also require a Conservation Management Permit from NHESP. A 401 Water

Quality Certification is no longer necessary as the development is not a subdivision nor is the parcel the result of a subdivision in the past.

Review of the 2nd NPC

The land area being developed is exactly the same as proposed under the senior living development in the first NPC, however, a second parcel of non contiguous land containing 13.7 acres is proposed to be protected for the purposes of providing open space. The current development is on the same parcel of land as the previously reviewed development. It is also has the same roadway layout, grading, and wetland disturbances. For this reason, the wetland alteration area (for roadway construction only) is the same as has already been reviewed. Bordering vegetated wetland disturbed (1592 square feet (sf)) due to roadway construction will be replicated in kind with 2275 sf. In order to allow for the additional density without increasing the disturbance area, the floor areas of the condominium units were reduced, thereby only creating an additional 0.2 acres or 2% more impervious area. As part of the layout adjustment, an additional 0.41 acres or 2% more land area alteration is required.

In its comment letter, MassDEP has stated that a new Notice of Intent will be required for the project which must comply with all current, applicable performance standards for work proposed in wetlands. Therefore, I ask the proponent to provide MassDEP with the necessary information so that it can conduct its review of the project site. In addition, because a portion of the project is located within a Priority Habitat, I remind the proponent that the project must comply with applicable requirements of the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act.

The development that was previously reviewed was for senior housing; consequently, the domestic water needs and vehicle trips per day were much lower than for standard residential housing. As a result of the second NPC, the domestic water demand for the project has increased by 8,316 gallons per day. The wastewater generated from the site will increase by 10,450 gallons per day. Although there is an increase in wastewater generation, the Northbridge Treatment Plant has the capacity to handle the additional flows. The design capacity of the plant is 2.1 million gallons per day. The wastewater design flow was calculated based on 83 two bedroom units and 41 three bedroom units at 110 gallons per day. The proponent has stated that the proposed sewers, including a pump station, will be owned and operated by the Town. The increase in gallons per day is different for water and wastewater due to irrigation water being accounted for in the previously reviewed project.

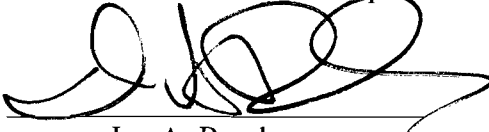
The Town of Northbridge's Board of Selectmen have adopted the 4:1 removal rate under the Town's Inflow/Infiltration (I/I) Policy. For this reason, the amount of inflow and infiltration that will be required to be removed from the existing system will significantly increase due to the change in housing type. The total number of I/I gallons that would have been removed under the prior project (senior housing) was 85,360 gallons whereas the total number of I/I gallons to be

removed under the current plan is 127,160 gallons. This will result in the increased mitigation of an additional 41,800 gallons to be removed from the existing system.

Due to the change in housing types, the number of vehicles per day has also increased by 433 trips per day to a total of 771. The large increase in vehicle trips does not represent a direct correlation to a similar increase in the number of units or floor space. The project started as 97 units of senior housing and increased to 124 units of residential housing, however, the increase in floor area between the two projects only increased by 2,984 square feet.

Based on a review of the information provided by the proponent, a review of the comment letters, and after consultation with the state agencies, I am confident that MassDEP and NHESP have sufficient permitting authority to condition this project so that no significant environmental impacts will occur. No further MEPA review is required.

May 22, 2009
Date


Ian A. Bowles

Comments received:

05/08/09 Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection/Southeast Regional Office