

To: Planning Board

October 26, 2023

From: John K. Haley
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On October 16, 2023, the developers of the renamed 489 Worcester Road project presented their most current plans. A PowerPoint presentation was submitted three minutes before the Planning Board meeting was called to order. It is impossible for anyone in attendance, including the Planning Board members, to thoughtfully respond to the presentation or their commentary.

Attached is a response to the representations made in their written materials and oral discussion at the October 16 meeting as well as from their prior submission and statements made at the open hearing at the High School.

Thank you for your consideration and I plan to join Citizens Speak during next Monday's meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

John K Haley

DEVELOPERS SUBMISSION TO PLANNING BOARD – October 16, 2023

ADDRESSING NEIGHBORHOOD CONCERNS

The developers submitted a list of how they have addressed 'Neighborhood Concerns' and how they plan to "Continue Wellesley residents and neighborhood outreach".

The Neighborhood still has significant concerns about the size of the Manor building of over 40 units. The proposed plan does nothing to preserve the character of the Neighborhood as claimed in the submission. It is an oversized building in the middle of a single-family home neighborhood. Two proposed two-family homes squeezed between the two existing homes on Cliff Road do not meet 'preservation/character' criteria in this neighborhood.

A survey of over 200 neighbors was undertaken and almost no one has interacted with the developers. Two owners, who were contacted, believe it was a continuing effort by the developers to potentially buy their homes.

Not sure this qualifies as "outreach".

At the public hearing at the High School, many participants asked repeatedly for financial information regarding the proposed price points of the condos to be sold. Nothing was submitted or even mentioned at the October 16 Planning Board meeting. They continue to advertise that this project will provide suitable housing for seniors who are downsizing. (See Wellesley Housing Stock in their submission). The average listed selling prices for units in the Bristol and the Terrazza projects are approximately \$2.9 million and \$2.2 million, respectively. Not sure "suitable" applies at these prices.

The developers ignored the most echoed request from that meeting and 3 months later provided nothing. They state 40R allows the Town to develop housing in partnership with the developer. Without transparency there can be no partnership.

In 2022, the Swellesley Report reported – 'Executive Director Jop says attainable for those downsizing from homes selling at \$1.6M or higher might be looking for something in the \$700K-\$1M range. They're not looking for the sorts of \$2M condos hitting the market in town. For first-time homebuyers, they're probably seeking homes in the \$600K-\$800K range, but "that stock does not exist," Jop says'. Does this development fit into these goals?

DEVELOPERS SUBMISSION TO PLANNING BOARD 489 Worcester Road/Route 9– October 16, 2023

CHAPTER 40R ZONING

The developer submission on October 16, 2023, states the development at 489 Worcester will generate the following:

1. Multiple fiscal benefits to Town
2. Building permit fees
3. Significant increase in annual tax revenue

Multiple fiscal benefits – When new multifamily or single-family homes are built, there is usually an increase in property tax revenues for the Town. Hans Larsen, former executive director, began budgeting the impact of teardowns and new higher valuation homes 15 years ago when they became a recurring event. The cost of services, new infrastructure costs and school attendance increases also need to be considered. Comparing the cost burden of 48 new units of multifamily housing to 10 new homes or 20 townhomes is critical to understanding the net fiscal impact. Claiming this project will result in a ‘significant increase in annual tax revenue’ is only one side of the equation. Developing 10 single family homes may be better for the Town economically than 48 units of multifamily.

A 48-unit development includes both positives and negatives which needs to be carefully analyzed by the Town. Is the net benefit worth the impact on town services, infrastructure, schools, traffic, wetlands, wildlife, the historical character of the neighborhood, etc.? Thinking through the unintended consequences is also an important consideration. For example, this project plus the additional projects Rte 9 currently in the works and future projects adjacent to Route 9, may finally overwhelm this highway. Drivers will use neighborhood streets and God help us, Washington Street as alternative routes.

The developers also point out that under Chapter 40R a cash incentive payment and density bonus will be received. They did not include the amount in their submission nor mention that it is a one-time payment. During the discussions, they represented it could be as much as \$200,000. Is a one-time payment of \$200,000 really an important factor in this decision?

TRAFFIC DISCUSSION - 489 Worcester Road/Route 9

1. Traffic Studies

Tom Ulfelder represented that the Select Board will request a Peer Review of the submitted developer traffic study. Tom Ulfelder also committed to having this submitted traffic study reconciled to the Upham/Hardy traffic study which rated the Cliff Rd/Rte 16 intersection as an F.

Likely, there is a traffic study when the intersection of Cliff and Rte 16 was reconfigured some time ago. Benchmarking the traffic volume and patterns of this Study to today may add insight to the current traffic problems. Consideration must also be given to the rates of growth in increasing traffic volumes in the future. Specifically, the additional traffic generated as students from this area begin attending to Sprague. There's no going back if a mistake is made. It needs to be analyzed through a hyper critical lens.

The preliminary study submitted by the developer states, "Project can be accommodated within the confines of the existing transportation infrastructure in a safe and efficient manner". This conclusion was reached before the developers changed the name of the project to 489 Worcester and represented the traffic flow would be re-directed out the Worcester Rd exit. This naming change was done to give the illusion the project will not materially impact the Cliff/16/9 traffic corridor.

2. Route 9 entrance to 489 Worcester

Most Wellesley drivers know that when travelling west bound on Rte 9 from the traffic lights at the Fire Station and taking a right turn onto Bradford or Edmunds from Rte 9 is only for daredevils. This is especially true when the long line of vehicles is released from these traffic lights and they're accelerating uphill westbound on Rte 9. With the currently posted speed sign of 50mph directly in front of 489, the long line of vehicles accelerating up the incline from the lights will make it very difficult to safely enter or exit the planned development.

Most drivers queued at the stop lights at the Fire station will opt to take the Rte 9 Cliff Road exit to avoid trying to navigate a right turn into 489 from Rte 9. Every Amazon, FedEx, USPO, taxi will use this exit, enter Cliff Road, and then take an immediate left into 489 from Cliff.

Because of these factors, most residents and visitors will enter the proposed project from Cliff Rd as will most commercial vehicles when traveling westbound on Rte 9. Access to 489 from Rte 16 or from Weston will entail travelling on Cliff Road to the entrance of the development on Cliff.

3. 489 Worcester Exiting

When needing to travel east or west on Rte 16/Washington Street or headed north toward Weston or south toward Needham, most vehicles will use the Cliff Rd exit. Some may exit onto Rte 9 and then likely take a right on Bradford or Edmunds. Some will continue and use the turnarounds on Rte 9.

Only vehicles headed west to Weston Road and points beyond will use the exit from 489 onto Rte 9 and not turn into residential side streets.

4. Garden, Chestnut, Rte 9 Cliff Rd. Exit

During commuting hours, both in the morning, evening and school commencement and adjournment, Cliff Road is often backed up to Cushing Road approximately 1/3 of a mile up the hill. It can take 4-5 traffic light changes to enter Rte 16. Drivers entering Cliff from Garden, Chestnut and Rte 9 are dependent upon the courtesy of drivers on Cliff to join the lengthy line of cars. Additional vehicles entering or exiting utilizing the Cliff Road entrance will only add to this gridlock and traffic delays. There has also recently been significant queuing in the right lane of Rte. 9 approaching the exit ramp to Cliff Road because those drivers in the exit lane are unable to cut into the stopped traffic on Cliff Road heading towards Rte 16.

Considering the factors above:

Most of the traffic generated by this project means additional cars and trucks will be entering and exiting using the Cliff Road driveway.

These intersections are already overwhelmed with too many vehicles and there are not a lot of options to reconfigure these roads to improve traffic flow.

A few points:

- The Developers changing the project name and representing they are channeling the traffic out onto Rte 9 is not a well thought out solution and misleading.*
- The preliminary traffic study which concluded the project is feasible without any real location data or a review the most recent study and then somehow concluded tweaking the timing of the traffic lights at Cliff and Washington St would solve some of the resulting traffic issues.*
- The Town needs to aggressively challenge the representations being put forth by the developers and get feedback from the neighborhood on the existing traffic problems in this area. Data analytics do not account for driver behavior.*

- *The Neighborhood's biggest concern is the transformation of the quiet and winding side streets in Wellesley Hills. Many of these streets no longer have sidewalks. Often, there are more kids, dogs, parents, bicycles and walkers than cars on these streets. The development at 489 risks pushing drivers to seek alternatives routes through this historic neighborhood, increasing the dangers to its residents big and small. As noted previously, traffic volumes will continue to increase particularly along the Rte 9 corridor. These future traffic increases and the opening of the new Hardy School must be considered as this project moves through the review process.*