

Mrs. Julie Driscoll
23 Walsh Avenue
Stoneham, MA 02180

November 13, 2013

Members of the Board
Board of Selectmen
35 Central Street
Stoneham, MA 02180

Subject: The Commons at Weiss Farm;
MassHousing Project #SA-13-006

Dear Members of the Board:

As a resident of Stoneham, I am very concerned about the application for Site Approval submitted by Weiss Farm, LLC currently under review at MassHousing. The proposed construction of 264 apartments and 456 parking spaces at the proposed location at 170 Franklin Street is inappropriate. I urge you to ask MassHousing to reject the application.

Reasons for Project Rejection

Additional Housing is Not Needed in Stoneham

Construction of 264 apartments on Franklin Street is inconsistent with local housing needs based on the latest decennial U. S. Census for Stoneham and surrounding communities. For 2010, Stoneham had 9,458 rented and owned housing units of which 8,994 were occupied and 464 were vacant, a rental vacancy rate of 7.4% and a homeowner vacancy rate of .9%. Taking a broader view, Stoneham and seven bordering cities and towns (Malden, Medford, Melrose, Reading, Wakefield, Winchester, and Woburn) collectively had 114,828 rented and owned housing units of which 109,158 were occupied and 5,670 were vacant, a rental vacancy rate of 6.1% and a homeowner vacancy rate of 1%. This data shows that construction of 264 additional apartments in Stoneham is obviously not necessary. (Source: American Factfinder, U. S. Department of Commerce, U. S. Census Bureau).

Stoneham currently has a program that addresses the housing needs of low income people. Stoneham Housing Authority oversees 285 units of low income housing (of which 15 units were vacant due to remodeling as of 9/9/2013.) Tenants pay not more than 30% of their income toward the rent. (Source: Sharon Wilkins, Executive Director of Stoneham Housing Authority at board meeting held on 9/9/2013.)

Busy Franklin Street and Endangerment of Children

Construction of 264 apartments and 456 parking spaces will bring hundreds of additional automobiles entering and exiting Franklin Street on a daily basis creating a huge safety issue especially for the high number of school children in the Franklin Street area.

Franklin Street is already highly traversed because of excessive demand on the roadway. On Franklin Street there are several condominiums and apartment buildings, two child care centers, a high school, a Dunkin Donuts, a pizza store, a restaurant, a convenience store and other businesses. On top of all that an assisted living complex with 88 apartments is currently under construction on Franklin Street.

Residents of Stoneham and Melrose use Franklin Street as the way to reach Main Street and the center of Town where there are more businesses and restaurants, a condominium, the Town common, a theater, a post office, a library and the nearby Town Hall.

Commuters from Stoneham and Melrose use Franklin Street because it provides an access way to three major highways, Routes 1, 93 and 95. The lengthy backup of automobiles in the high school area on Franklin Street is intolerable especially when school opens and closes each day. Parents use Franklin Street to drive their kids to public and private schools in Stoneham such as to Stoneham High School and to the elementary schools such as Colonial Park Elementary School, South Elementary School and Greater Boston Academy. Buses servicing three campuses at the Mystic Valley Regional Charter School in Malden pick up and drop off students at two locations on Franklin Street in Stoneham. (See MVRCS website at www.mvracs.org.)

There are 12 schools in Stoneham, six public and six private, accounting for a student population of 3305. Nine of the 12 schools are within a half mile of Franklin Street. Three of the 12 schools are on Franklin Street including the high school which has a student population of 675. The other two schools on Franklin are private for preschool aged students.

Given the high concentration of schools in the already busy Franklin Street area, the addition of 264 apartments and hundreds of automobiles on Franklin Street will create a serious safety issue for children. Additional police, traffic lights and traffic calming devices are not likely to make Franklin Street any safer for children. To consider adding an apartment project anywhere on Franklin Street is ridiculous and obviously unacceptable.

Negative Environmental Impact

Stoneham is unique because the Middlesex Fells Reservation comprises one third of the 6.6 square miles of land area in Stoneham. The Fells is enjoyed by Stoneham residents as well as residents from communities in the surrounding area. The Fells is readily accessible by bus lines, rapid transit and commuter rail

and by automobile from Routes 28, I-93 and I-95. Construction of 264 apartments and 456 parking spaces on Franklin Street leading to an increase in traffic, congestion and pollution caused by hundreds of additional automobiles will further erode what remains of the unique bucolic environment of the Middlesex Fells area enjoyed by residents of Stoneham and surrounding communities. (Sources: FY 2012 Town Annual Report and website of Friends of the Fells at <http://www.fells.org/index.html>.)

Thank you for reading my lengthy letter. As you can see, I have a number of concerns. The overwhelming number of residents of Stoneham believe that this apartment project is inappropriate for the Town of Stoneham especially at the proposed location on Franklin Street. This application should be rejected.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Julie Driscoll". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Julie Driscoll