



TOWN OF TOPSFIELD

Historic Commission

8 West Common Street, Topsfield, Massachusetts 01983

February 15, 2023

Topsfield ZBA Request for Comments regarding Emerson Homes 40B, 10 High Street

Dear Members of the Topsfield Zoning Board of Appeals,

At a meeting held on February 7, 2023 at Town Hall, the Topsfield Historic Commission discussed the impact to the Topsfield Common Local and National Historic District by the proposed 40B Comprehensive Permit Application for a project by the Caleb Group at 10 High Street known as Emerson Homes. Normally work done for this address would fall under the Historic District Bylaw, adopted in 1974 by a vote of Town Meeting. The Commission concerns itself with the requests and applications of the residents, business properties, and property owners within the District regarding changes in exterior architectural features, new buildings, additions, demolition, exterior renovations, appurtenances, fences, walls, signs, and the like pursuant to the by-law. We understand that the applicant is applying for a comprehensive permit and seeking waivers from local bylaws.

Our main concern is the appearance at the entrance on High Street as the curb cut will be in the heart of the Common District. We would like to see renderings of the proposed entrance including signage designs and posts as well as photographs from other similar projects by Caleb. While the Town has expressed a desire to limit light pollution, there are externally illuminated signs such as the sign for the 1842 Meeting House. If additional street lights are part of the proposed project we would like more detail and examples of proposed illumination.

We are also concerned about the proposed crosswalk as the addition of more metal signs and utilities including flashing pedestrian lights will detract from the historic character of the district. Consider any new crosswalks to be of a different material to create a visual change rather than flashing lights and/or consider pedestrian scale lighting of a design in keeping with historic lighting styles. In-road warning lights (IRWL) can be used rather than flashing poles similar to those at the Rail Trail Crossings. In-road lights are approved by the US Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration. They alert the driver without adding any additional roadside clutter and are very effective for a mid-block crosswalk in an historic areas limiting the roadside distractions for the driver to process. There are now solar-powered versions providing energy-efficiency.

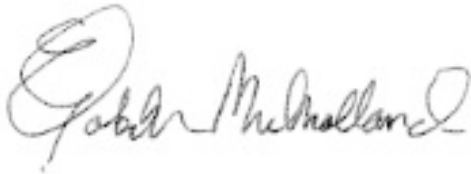
If sidewalks are being proposed in the project, rather than adding more pavement or concrete to Topsfield, detracting from its rural character there is a movement towards the use of permeable interlocking geogrids which will allow grass to grow through and has the strength and surface suitability to act as an ADA compliant sidewalk while allowing water to percolate.

If fences or walls or other structures are being proposed in the view shed of the District, the Commission requests renderings of proposed design including materials and photographs of similar projects.

Another potential change or addition that was proposed by the applicant at an earlier ZBA meeting was the idea of adding a traffic light or roundabout at the end of the Local and National Register Topsfield Common District where High and Main Streets intersect. At this time, the Commission is adamantly opposed to such an addition or alteration of this area for both historic impact on the District and the loss of green space and community gathering space.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment, however given there is very little in the application with respect to the entrance area that opens into the District it is difficult to assess impact or suggest where changes can be made to be more in keeping with the District. Therefore, we generally request the applicant provide additional information and visuals to review and The Commission can then provide further feedback.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Elizabeth Mulholland". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "E" and a long, sweeping underline.

Elizabeth Mulholland, Chair
Topsfield Historic Commission
Town Hall
Topsfield, MA 01983
978-790-1271

cc. Lynne Bermudez, ZBA Coordinator