

February 7, 2023

Robert Moriarty, Esq., Chairman
Zoning Board of Appeals
Topsfield Town Hall
8 West Common Street
Topsfield, MA 01983

Dear Mr. Moriarty,

We are writing to the ZBA to express our objections with regards to the proposed Caleb Group's Emerson Homes 40b project to be located on the playing field behind the Emerson Center and Gould Barn and to petition the ZBA **not to approve** the request to build. Our concerns as 32 year tax paying residents of Topsfield are addressed within.

- **Desecration of the Topsfield Historical District**

The Caleb Group's housing project is slated to be built within the designated historic district of Topsfield. We question how this proposed project meets the restrictions of the National Historic District Commission. If this project is approved, in the historic district of Topsfield, it will besmirch the historical treasure of the Town Common and surrounding buildings for which many citizens have worked tirelessly to ensure preservation. This proposed structure will set a negative precedent for further projects.

- **Impact on traffic on High Street and Main Street**

As a daily commuter to Boxford from Towne Hill Lane for the past 28 years, I have waited at the stop sign to cross Main Street while up to 12 cars at a time scream past the common to take a left onto High Street at 25-30 miles an hour. I have often been amazed that I have not lost a bumper or more to the speeding cars as they race toward Danvers, Beverly and beyond. The addition of a neighborhood access road into this intersection as proposed is dangerous, irresponsible and pure folly. It is a hazard to community safety. The proposed blinking pedestrian light by the Caleb Group would have little effect on the flow of traffic. It is not Topsfield's responsibility to accommodate the Caleb Group's project by taking on the traffic management issues created by their project, as they suggest. In addition, the emergency exit for the development would be at the end of Deer Run disrupting the safety and family viability of this neighborhood. As we all know, this egress would become the preferred access

route once residents experience the danger of pulling out into that busy intersection of High and Main Street.

- **Impact on Pedestrian Safety**

The proposed site of the Caleb project is in the heart of our town. Residents and **children** readily access the library, Proctor School, Town Hall, the playground and the rail trail. The additional traffic created by the residents of the development as they travel to their work, their service providers, contractors, landscapers, delivery vehicles and *The Ride* pose a safety hazard for the residents of Topsfield.

- **Addition of 44 new clients to the Council On Aging**

This will place a significant strain on the Council On Aging which ultimately translates to the taxpayers of Topsfield. The Council On Aging van is already full on weekly grocery shopping trips. The van is to be replaced in 2025 at a cost to the town of \$125,000. It is realistic that another van will be required. Again this project compounds the additional tax burden to the citizens of Topsfield.

- **Additional demands on Fire and Police departments**

The Caleb Group's project will necessitate additional resources/manpower for these departments. Again, the Caleb Group places additional tax burdens on Topsfield residents.

- **Natural resources Impact**

There are vernal pools, wetlands and a perennial stream that run through the property. This project will disrupt this natural wildlife habitat and open space.

- **Environmental impact**

The impact of a major septic system and water treatment facility to be constructed next to a waterway is environmental suicide. The increase in pavement and the building itself will create significant challenges to stormwater management that will further disrupt the site. It goes without saying that the emissions from vehicles and from the residential units' heating and cooling systems will increase the carbon footprint of the site.

- **Water Impact / Dead River**

Any citizen who was in Topsfield during the summer of 2022 need not be reminded of the fragility of our water source from the Ipswich River Watershed Association. From the trickle that was the Ipswich River last summer it is incredible that we had any water flowing through our pipes last summer in the

midst of a catastrophic drought. I encourage the ZBA to review the Caleb Group's proposal and its impact on our water source by speaking with Wayne Castonguay, Executive Director of the Ipswich River Watershed Association at 978-412-8200. To quote Mr. Castonguay from September 3, 2022, "To be blunt, the river is dead. The biggest problem for the river isn't the drought - it is the water withdrawals; it is because we are also taking too much water out. If we didn't take that water out, the river could still sustain."

- **Lack of need**

The fact that Topsfield has 7 Over 55 projects of which 72 units are affordable rental or ownership units covers the town's obligation to the community. This project does not help Topsfield.

- **Open space**

The Congregational Church which presently owns the property, was approached by citizens but refused to offer the property to the Town of Topsfield for consideration for purchase. The church knows that their property has been a vital part of our youth sports groups. As community members, the church has historically offered that parcel of land to the citizens, in the town in which they preach the word of God, for sporting activities. As a christian organization they allowed the use of this land to benefit the community which they served. For some unfathomable reason, when asked by the town citizens to have the opportunity to let the town purchase the property so it could continue to serve the residents of Topsfield in recreational pursuits, the church refused. If this property is owned by the town of Topsfield, the wetlands, stream, wildlife, traffic, police/fire departments and the very nature of the historical part of town would be preserved without long term costs to the taxpayers of Topsfield.

- **Parking impact**

The Caleb Group has presented a design with 44 parking spaces. It is short sighted and a selling point of the Caleb Group to profess that most residents will not have vehicles. Where is the guarantee of that premise? These residents will be as young as 55 years old. Most families, even those of "low income" have 2 vehicles in order to go to work and attend to their daily needs. Considering this to be a plausible situation, there is a potential to have 44 vehicles needing to be parked outside of the footprint of this development. Where will they, their guests and service providers park? Will their vehicles line the common as there are no parking restrictions there? Will they use the spaces in front of the library which will require patrons to park in other locations to access the library? Perhaps they will park on Main Street lining both sides of the road in front of the

Congregational Church. Another option will be for vehicles to park on both sides of High Street. The implications for the safety of our Proctor School students and residents is clear and avoidable.

- **School impact**

Is this development restricted to adults only? If not, the impact on our school system must be considered. It is not uncommon for adults 55 and older to shelter their young adults and their children.

- **Topsfield residents disqualified**


From the income restrictions on 40B properties, it appears that no Topsfield resident, other than those currently living in the 72 affordable housing units, would qualify for occupancy. Again, the residents of Topsfield are being asked to bear the significant financial and environmental costs with no benefit to any of our residents.

- **Congregational Church NOT community minded**

The fact that this church has enjoyed tax free benefits, courtesy of the Commonwealth, at its present location on Main Street since 1759 in addition to reaping the benefits of state, federal and Topsfield Historical Society grants to support the steeple restoration project in 2006-2007 has not cemented the town as community. The Congregational church is listed on the National Register of Historic Places as part of the Topsfield Common National Register District. Yet, in spite of centuries of town and Commonwealth support, the Congregational church refused to offer Topsfield the opportunity to preserve the Historic District by making a bid to purchase the land. The result is the Caleb option which will benefit the investors of this project while placing a burden on the Town of Topsfield citizens for years to come.

The Congregational church owns the property and has every right to sell it. However, being a town institution for more than 264 years, one would like to think that the Church elders would harbor a sense of community and would offer the parcel to the town for consideration of purchase before taking steps toward changing the historic, safety and financial face of Topsfield forever.

Sincerely,



Debra Spencer Holt

Scott W. Holt

26 Town Hill Lane

Topsfield, MA 01983