

March 14, 2023

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

**Re: Additional Traffic Issues, Emerson Homes 40B**

Dear Chairman Moriarty and ZBA Members:

We listened intently to the ZBA discussion of the Emerson Homes 40B traffic studies and the comments from the engineers, board members, and others during the February 28<sup>th</sup> ZBA hearing. However, after rereviewing the traffic studies with the hearing comments in mind, we noticed important safety issues that were not addressed in the two reports and the hearing conclusions.

**The Traffic Studies and Open Issues:**

The Vanasse Report thoroughly develops the traffic volume data and concludes that the added traffic volume from the Emerson Homes project will be immaterial. Of course, the added traffic from a 44-unit residence building will be a very small % of the entire traffic volume on High Street. The real question is, are additional dangers introduced by this choice of driveway location.

We request that the Developer's engineers and the Peer Review engineers to each research and analyze the questions below independently and present their answers in writing, please. This is intended to provide comprehensive assurance that this driveway location will not create additional danger. And then we would appreciate the ZBA member responses to these questions and answers.

**Questions:**

Background for Questions 1 to 4: The Vanasse Report states that (i) the distance from the stop sign on westbound High St., at South Main St. is 250 feet from the proposed driveway, (see F1), (ii) the State minimum for line-of-sight distance is 250 feet, (See F2). Meanwhile, traffic is released by the Route 1 green light onto westbound High St. (Rt 97) in groups of 3, 5, 10 or even 15 vehicles, especially at rush hours. These groups of cars get lined up at the westbound High St. stop sign at the Main intersection.

On a slow commuting day, Friday March 3<sup>rd</sup>, in 45 minutes there were 2 to 14 cars waiting at this stop sign 34 times. Thirteen times the cars waiting stretched back in front of the proposed driveway location. Coming from a standing stop eastbound at the High St. and Main St. intersection a driver can reach 30 to 40 miles an hour at the driveway with moderate acceleration.

Questions for each Engineering firm to answer, and for the ZBA to consider, please:

- 1) Did the engineers consider that these lines of cars waiting at the stop sign can stretch out for 50, 100, or 250 or more feet, blocking and reducing the real line of sight to 200, 150, or zero feet?
- 2) Do the engineers consider that all these actual line of sight distances, with blockage from cars in line for the stop sign, are below the State minimums for line of sight?
- 3) Isn't the eastbound traffic on Rt. 97 that is obscured by the line of cars at the stop sign even more dangerous because this traffic accelerates to a higher speed onto High Street than the westbound traffic which is slowing to a stop.?
- 4) Isn't this line-of-sight reduction a new, real traffic danger that is created by traffic entering High St. from the proposed driveway?

Background for Questions 5 - 7: The studies do not address alternative entry ways. For example, there are two physically plausible ways for the driveway to enter and/or exit onto East Common St., with traffic then routed onto North Common Street to go either west, east, or south at a point on Rt 97 with no obstructions.

Questions, please:

- 5) Why were alternative entry/exit points not considered?
- 6) Isn't it common sense that an exit onto a quiet street like East Common St. would be safer?
- 7) Aren't your studies incomplete without this analysis?

Background for Questions 8 - 14:

The Peer Review Report suggests a "Road Safety Audit" for this intersection after the project is committed. Meanwhile, both reports acknowledge that this intersection's danger is above the State average right now, before introducing the complication from the driveway.

Questions:

- 8) Isn't it somewhat rash to introduce a complicating factor to an already dangerous intersection, and evaluate the safety AFTER the complicating factor is committed?
- 9) Isn't there a reasonable probability that a Road Safety Analysis could conclude that having elderly and other drivers entering into an accelerating traffic pattern that is often obscured needs added traffic controls, such as a stop light system?
- 10) If stoplights or other traffic controls are added to this intersection after the project is committed and costed out, will the state pay for it? Does Topsfield pay for it?
- 11) What are the cost ranges for stoplight systems for this intersection and/or a nearby driveway entrance? (Google says the cost for a stoplight system can be \$200,000 to \$500,000.)
- 12) Is it possible to create a traffic study focused on this situation's risks, and not incur the same high costs that a state study may incur?
- 13) If the study concludes after the project is committed that the roads need to be reconfigured, who pays for that? Topsfield, the State?

- 14) Wouldn't it be prudent to plan for two stop lights on east and westbound High Street, right at the proposed driveway, that would only be activated to orange and red when a driver was exiting the Project?

Background for Questions 15 - 17:

The Vanasse Report cites several Topsfield projects to estimate future growth. Yet residents of Topsfield know that much of the growth in traffic along Rt 97 is commuters from Georgetown, Boxford, North Andover and further northwest going to the greater Beverly area. (The Cummings Centers are prime examples.)

Questions:

- 15) What does the growth data look like with the northwest and south east communities and business centers included?
- 16) Don't through commuters typically have different driving habits than local drivers?
- 17) What are the differences in driving styles for commuters vs. local drivers?

Thank you in advance for asking the two traffic consulting firms to address these questions in writing. And we would appreciate the ZBA's consideration of these issues.

Sincerely,



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Topsfield

Footnotes:

F1: Vanasse and Associates, September 15, 2022 Memorandum. Figure 1 illustration following page 2.

F2: Vanasse and Associates, September 15, 2022 Memorandum. Page 13, Table 7.