



**Turner Miller Group**  
planning consensus community

December 12, 2016

Hon. Paul S. Rosenberg, Mayor  
Hon. Members, Village of Rye Brook Board of Trustees  
938 King Street  
Rye Brook, NY 10573

Re: Proposed North Ridge Street Development

Dear Honorable Mayor and Trustees:

Below please find my comments on the proposed North Ridge Street Development, submitted on behalf of my clients, the Katz and Lanoso/Otero families who reside on Eagles Bluff. The comments below reiterate much of what I stated during the Public Hearing on November 8, 2016. Just prior to finalizing this letter, I was made aware of comments by the Village's Planner as well as the response by the applicant to her many salient points, some of which mirror our own comments and suggestions. I have included some thoughts on these responses at the end of this letter.

I have been providing planning consulting services in the Hudson Valley for 18 years and as a member of the American Institute of Certified Planners have professionally pledged to, "seek social justice by working to expand choice and opportunity for all persons, recognizing a special responsibility to plan for the needs of the disadvantaged and to promote racial and economic integration." Economic integration is at the heart of inclusionary housing provisions, and I commend the Village of Rye Brook for not only adopting a floating zone for Fair and Affordable Housing, but for also encouraging its application to multiple sites throughout the Village.

To be clear I do not by any means oppose the construction of affordable housing units at the site on North Ridge Street. However, it is my professional opinion that the proposed affordable housing development, as currently designed, does not adequately integrate into the fabric of this residential neighborhood as required by sound planning practice and Village code requirements.

It is best practice when integrating affordable housing either into a new development or existing established neighborhood to size structures and design/layout sites in harmony with surrounding market-rate housing. This offers anonymity to the affordable housing, which benefits the owners of both the market rate and affordable housing units by seamlessly blending the affordable units into the community. This is the heart of inclusionary zoning, and avoids the stigma and negative outcomes of isolating affordable units in an obviously differentiated "project," as unfortunately was historic practice. I recognize that unlike affordable housing integrated into new-construction developments, it is very difficult to achieve complete anonymity for inclusionary units proposed in

existing neighborhoods, such as here. Nevertheless, any apparent differences between the proposed affordable housing and the existing neighborhood must be minimized to the greatest extent practicable.

These planning goals and Village Code requirements have not been achieved in the proposed North Ridge Street development project.

While the applicant has made efforts to improve the front facade of the buildings, the current proposed site design and other facades are clearly discordant with the character of the surrounding neighborhood for the following reasons:

- The proposed surface parking lot is an obvious outward sign that the property does not contain a single-family detached home, and the number of contiguous spaces accentuates the much higher density of the lot;
- The tremendous retaining walls associated with the parking lot clearly convey an institutional feeling to what should resemble a single-family residential site;
- Arborvitae screens and privacy fencing are not common in this area of the Village, and are unobtrusively employed here to try to obscure the site from public view. Additionally, the density of the screen and height of the fence could promote a feeling that the parking lot is a "hiding area" or unsafe space;
- The rear facades are visible from Eagles Bluff and do not mask the clear multifamily nature of the structures, or their small unit sizes which are out of character with the neighborhood;
- The cross-walk with flashing pedestrian signals is clearly not a feature associated with a single-family home in a low-density neighborhood.

Without improvement of these discordant features, the development cannot truly be incorporated into the fabric of the neighborhood. We suggest the following illustrative list of potential design changes that should be seriously considered by the Applicant to achieve a design that is in keeping with the pattern of development in the area:

### **1. Design the Entire Project to Be Truly Inclusionary**

The proposed development makes a fundamental planning misstep in that it separates the market-rate and affordable units on the site. Under the current proposal, the existing home is maintained, an additional luxury home is proposed, and smaller affordable units are clustered away from the proposed luxury unit. Such practice is actually and ironically *exclusionary*, and contrary to the inclusionary housing objectives the Village seeks to achieve.

A superior alternative would be to distribute density throughout the site in multiple duplex structures (or even possibly triplex structures) designed to resemble single-family homes and each containing market and affordable units. This arrangement would more closely mirror the rhythm and appearance of homes across the street. No significant site work would be required for a large surface parking lot, thereby decreasing developer cost. Traffic would be dispersed to multiple driveways rather than a single access point, and with proper driveway design allowing for head out departures, should provide greater traffic safety over other area homes.

## **2. Utilize the Site Topography to Eliminate the Tremendous Retaining Wall and Expansive Parking Lot**

The current site design attempts to overcome the topography rather than work with it. The rapid fall-off of the site from North Ridge Street clearly provides an opportunity for the proposed homes to incorporate individual garages under a ground story fronting on North Ridge Street. Instead, this space is used for walkout basements, which will only meet habitability standards to the rear. By proposing multiple structures, adequate width can be allotted to provide a two-car garage in the basement of each unit.

If the structures are broken into duplexes, normal residential driveways should be sufficient to access the rear of structures. With creative design, one unit in each structure could even have a front loaded garage while the others gains access from a rear-loaded or side loaded garage.

Even if the Board pursues all the affordable units on a single lot at the north end of the site as is currently proposed, it is not difficult to see an arrangement similar to James Way to the south where a triplex structure and duplex structure each with private garages utilize a shared private driveway that ultimately exits at the currently proposed curbcut. Such an arrangement provides efficiency as the common private driveway can accommodate some overflow parking when individual homes require it.

While such an arrangement would still be exclusionary in the sense that it wouldn't integrate with other market units proposed on the site, it would still be superior to the current proposed layout. This arrangement would preclude the need to construct the 21' high complex of retaining walls, engineered slope and privacy fence that is currently proposed to support and obscure the surface parking lot.

## **3. Landscape the Site as a Single-Family Lot**

Suburban single-family homeowners are proud of their investments in their homes. They do not plant solid screens of Arborvitae to obscure their homes. Nor do most families wish to live behind green walls and 6' high fences designed to hide their homes from the rest of the community. The site should be landscaped with high-quality plantings that present the site as if it were a single-family home consistent with the other homes in the neighborhood, and that will reflect the pride that future residents will likely have to live in an outstanding community like Rye Brook.

## **4. Improve the Rear Facades**

While it would not be cost effective to provide the same level of architectural treatment of rear facades as is provided for the front, the applicant could certainly improve the appearance of the rear facade to better harmonize it with surrounding residences.

## **5. Eliminate the Crosswalk**

The proposed crosswalk is just not consistent with the character of a single-family neighborhood. If pedestrian safety is a concern, a sidewalk should be provided from the site south to a crosswalk in the vicinity of the intersection of North Ridge Street and West Ridge Drive.

## **Comments on the Responses of Clark Neuringer, R.A. to Marilyn Timpone-Mohamed ASLA, AICP**

I was very discouraged at the manner in which the applicant dismissed many points raised by Ms. Timpone-Mohamed in her e-mail dated November 18, 2016. I hope that the Board will consider having the applicant address the comments of the Village Planner and the public more substantively. More specifically:

**With regard to Item 1 (size of proposed building being too large),** it is incredibly disingenuous to argue that this project has been meaningfully reduced when the original proposal was never a realistic development proposal. To date, the applicant has provided no information substantiating claims that the economics of a two-building solution would not work, and this is highly doubtful just given the reduced grading and surface parking costs that would proceed from Ms. Timpone-Mohamed's suggestions.

Discussing building length with regard to community character is overly simplistic. The proposed site and structure will be clearly out of character with area residences despite approximating the "length" of some area homes. Statements that the building will look like a single-family home simply because one facade will resemble a single-family home ignores the neighbors to the side and rear completely and assumes that the only important view is the view from the street.

**With regard to Item 2 (impacts of proposed parking on scenic road),** the idea that the site elevation is below the street and therefore will be less visible is specious. The parking and home would be less visible if the site rose above the street, and was set back so as to obscure lower stories of the building and the rear of the parking lot. On the contrary, the proposed grades will result in either a birds-eye view of the site and surface parking or a clearly out-of-character vegetative screen as we have commented on previously.

The idea that wider unit modules would significantly increase floor area and cost is also specious. The developer could easily reduce building depth to offset increased widths with a multiple-building solution. Likewise stairs could be placed at the front of the garage rather than alongside the side of the garage. The current buildings are proposed to be 50 feet deep and could easily accommodate 25 feet of depth to parking, ten feet to stairs and still have 15 feet of depth to devote to storage, as well as having storage under the stairs. The applicant also provides no rationale for why attic space cannot be provided for storage purposes.

**With regard to Item 3 (rearrangement and re-design of parking area),** a proper response to the very salient design suggestion by Ms. Timpone-Mohamed would be to actually provide a sketch plan demonstrating why the suggestion would or would not work. Instead, the piecemeal consideration of suggestions, speculation on what would and wouldn't be well received, and the undemonstrated statements that certain design alternative must result in further impacts does nothing to improve the project in any way or address and respect the many concerns raised by the public and the Village planner. The current proposed layout is neither thoughtful nor creative and the applicant should put pencil to paper and sketch out ideas on how to make this project better, rather than arguing against improvements out of hand.

I hope that you will accept these comments in the spirit they are intended and challenge the applicant to get this project right and benefit not only the existing residents of Rye Brook but also the future low-income families of this site.

Thank you for your attention to these comments.

Respectfully Submitted,



Maximilian A. Stach, AICP  
Vice-President

cc:\ Kami and Craig Katz  
Sabrina Lanoso  
Daniel Otero  
Brad Schwartz, Esq.