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Dear Members of the Zoning Board of Appeals and Members of the Select Board:

I write as a resident of Manchester-by-the-Sea to state my strong opposition to the 136-unit development proposed by Strategic Land Ventures. My husband and I moved to Manchester-by-the-Sea in the summer of 2020, and I have since then attended (on Zoom) many meetings of the Zoning Board of Appeals. In these and other meetings, I am impressed by the knowledge, concern, and dedication of Manchester residents and Town leaders.

As someone who grew up in a working-class family in a working-class neighborhood in a well-resourced public school district in the Midwest, I deeply appreciate that affordable housing can benefit individuals, families, and entire communities. I understand that Manchester-by-the-Sea needs to take urgent action to meet the state's requirement that 10% of the housing units in a city or town be affordable units. Beyond meeting a legal obligation, the commitment to create truly affordable housing is, I hope, a civic, communal value of those who aim to cultivate a more just and equitable world.

What would be lost/sacrificed by the construction of large-scale, high-density housing on Shingle Hill/Shingle Place Hill? My objections to the SLV project are ones you have already heard from other Town residents and from experienced professionals who have presented to the ZBA. The construction proposed by SLV threatens to

- harm wildlife habitat, including vernal pools and wetlands.
- adversely affect groundwater quality and budget.
- mar and degrade the beauty and peacefulness of a large tract of relatively undisturbed woodland that generations of residents have enjoyed and have regarded as a gift of nature that they aimed to protect and preserve for generations to come.
- result in light pollution that would diminish/fade the increasingly rare natural phenomenon of a deeply dark night sky.
- increase noise pollution.
- increase road traffic and congestion.
- consume a considerable percentage of the Town's remaining water/sewer capacity. (Reports at recent ZBA meetings indicate that, while the Town could provide adequate water/sewer infrastructure and supply adequate water for the SLV project, supplying that amount of infrastructure and water for such a large development would bring the Town much closer to its maximum water and sewer capacities. I believe I heard the developer make casual mention of perhaps drilling a well to supply the water needed for the development's landscaping/garden maintenance. It is troubling that this was mentioned casually by the developer without his expressed curiosity about whether a well is permitted for this purpose and without his expressed concern about possible environmental and communal implications.)

- radically depart from the small-town, village nature of Manchester-by-the-Sea, which has housing that is generally lower density and much smaller scale than the proposed project. (The Manchester Essex Conservation Trust points out on its website that, in deciding whether to grant or deny a project proposed under 40B, MassHousing can consider scale and density patterns that are radically incongruent with the abutting/surrounding area or the town as a whole. A member of the Rockport Conservation Commission who has attended Manchester's ZBA meetings notes that the sheer number of waivers sought by SLV is indicative of the project being far outside the bounds of what the Town would ordinarily approve/support. He points out that SLV has sought over twenty waivers and that, in his experience, building projects more typically involve 2 or fewer requests for waivers.)

On behalf of whom and what would these losses and sacrifices be suffered? If the SLV project goes forward, the following would benefit most directly:

- the SLV developer and his investors;
- the large number of residents in the 102 market-rate units;
- the much smaller number of residents in what would be the 34 affordable units; and
- the Town of Manchester-by-the-Sea, in bringing the Town 34 units closer to meeting its 40B obligation to add 130 more units to its existing affordable housing stock (even though these 34 units would be only 25% of the 136 units the SLV project would add to the Town).

Why would residents of Manchester-by-the-Sea choose to sacrifice so much largely to subsize and support the already well-resourced? In the last few ZBA meetings the ZBA chairperson has noted that the Town voted to create a Limited Commercial District in the Shingle Hill area and that that vote constrains the Town's options at this point with respect to the SLV proposal. I did not live in Manchester when that vote occurred. It is not clear to me what residents understood themselves to be voting for and how that earlier vote now affects the Town's potential responses to SLV's proposal. It is one thing to agree to bear some loss on behalf of a commitment to provide affordable housing or promote some other greater good. But I imagine that Manchester residents, by their vote, did not intend for the Town to suffer the sacrifices and losses I list above largely for the benefit of those who already have considerable resources and who can already afford good housing.

What core values and commitments guide the Town's decisions? "No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it." This observation is attributed to Albert Einstein (although no one seems to be able to identify precisely when and where he said it). As we consider the details of the SLV proposal, I hope we are also taking some higher-level perspective and considering whether we might address the matter of affordable housing by working only with developers and agencies whose values and commitments align with those of the Town in that they have a demonstrated core commitment to providing housing that:

- is truly within financial reach of people of limited means;
- by its design, density, and scale integrates well with the existing built environment of this small, beautiful, seaside town and thereby promotes the development of an ever more inclusive, diverse, vibrant community; and

- maximally preserves and protects the natural resources of untouched land, wildlife habitat, native plants, wildlife, ground water, relative quiet, and dark night skies.

I understand that the Town is already pursuing a number of possibilities for such projects via efforts of the Manchester Housing Authority, Manchester Affordable Housing Trust, Select Board, Zoning Board, Planning Board, citizens groups, and others. The successful effort to purchase the Powder House Lane property, with the contributions by residents and in partnership with the North Shore Community Development Coalition, Inc. (NSCDC), demonstrates the power of creative leadership and communal action.

Given all of that, and given what I hear in various Town-related meetings, I trust that the residents and Town leaders of Manchester have the wherewithal to consolidate our investment of resources directly in service to the creation of additional affordable housing – and to choose not to lend our support and subsidy in service to a developer-driven project that largely benefits those who are already well-resourced.

Can we collectively orient to generational, communal wealth and wisdom? I recognize that there are many aspects of this situation that I do not fully understand. (My own professional training and experience is not in zoning policy and practice, engineering and infrastructure, zoning and housing law, environmental sciences, or environmental law.) But I understand the wisdom of naturalist John Muir's observation that "When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe." Many of the experts who have presented and reported to the ZBA speak to the complex, dynamic relationships of an ecosystem like that on Shingle Hill and how the proposed SLV development would disrupt and destroy forever much of what generations before us sought to protect and preserve.

I take to heart the Seventh Generation Principle of some Indigenous tribes that choices we make today should preserve and protect the world seven generations into the future. Referring to a statement on a plaque on a rock on Shingle Hill, one resident pointed out in the last ZBA meeting that preservation of that woodland is a legacy that has passed from generation to generation.

I appreciate that lofty ideals are hard to manifest in real-world practice. Yet I hope – and believe – that the citizens and governing/guiding boards of Manchester-by-the-Sea can continue to serve as stewards of this town's generational, communal wealth. May we all act with wisdom and courage on behalf of Manchester's common good as we make decisions that will be our legacy.

Sincerely,

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