

You are now faced with Manchester's most important permitting decision in many years: Strategic Land Ventures (SLV) proposed Chapter 40B, 136-apartment complex on Shingle Place Hill. I grew up and lived for many years in Manchester, and now reside in Essex. I love both towns and still consider myself a person engaged with and vested in Manchester. I am also past president of the Manchester Essex Conservation Trust, and am still on the Board, but this letter is all mine.

I urge you to apply the most thorough and rigorous standards possible in your review of the comprehensive permit for this project, seeking the maximum protection for the interests of all the Town's residents. I leave it to the ZBA to decide which option is likely to produce the best outcome: outright denial or approval with stringent conditions. I trust that you'll do your absolute best on behalf of the Town.

Of course you must weigh the destructive environmental and aesthetic impacts of the project, which are well known by now, particularly with regard to water resources. Herein, I want to emphasize a few further points.

1. SLV would strip the vegetation from the entire hilltop and then blast and remove an enormous amount of earth, mostly rock, during "site preparation". SLV has not stated how much this might be, but we know that they intend to use about 100,000 cubic yards of it for "cut and fill", that is, for construction of the road snaking around the flanks of the hill from School Street up to the complex. The total amount of blasted earth is likely twice that: 200,000 cubic yards (about 300,000 tons). Transport of the remaining blast material from the site would require over 8,000 dump truck loads, assuming 12 cubic yards per load. This operation comes with its own distinct impacts: shock waves, noise, and wear and tear, on nearby properties, conservation lands, and public infrastructure.

2. The 300-400 residents of "The Sanctuary" will be marooned on a hilltop, remote from the rest of the community and its schools, businesses and services. The complex would be served by an extremely steep access road with no sidewalk or safe route for bicycles. This is nearly exactly opposite the State's own guidelines for the siting of Chapter 40B projects. It would also be a virtual guarantor of hundreds of car trips per day, at a time when the State of Massachusetts is pushing hard for more housing located close to business districts and transportation services. The project would destroy woodlands that now sequester carbon, while also locking in decades of avoidable tailpipe pollution and traffic congestion from its residents' cars. Please note that project principal Geoff Engler has declined to act on the suggestion to install solar generating capacity and EV charging stations.

3. The Sanctuary grossly violates Mass Housing's guidance that 40B projects should be appropriate in scale and style for the surrounding neighborhood. Mr. Engler has repeatedly made the point that Shingle Place Hill "has no abutters", and that there is, in the sense of an affected neighborhood, no impact. I and many others in the community strongly disagree with this notion. The abutting

landowners include the Town of Manchester and private non-profit land trusts, all holding land protected for conservation purposes in perpetuity. In a larger sense, the abutters are the assemblage of plants and animals that make up the nearby wetlands and woodlands, as well as all the citizens of Manchester and the surrounding communities who value these lands. This vastly outsized complex would have profound negative impacts on its neighbors for decades to come: runoff, noise, artificial light, and visual blight, among others. It is in fact impossible to imagine ANY neighborhood in Manchester or its surrounding communities where The Sanctuary would fit in.

Mass Housing was made well aware of all these and other issues, including serious fire safety questions, in the excellent letter from the Board of Selectmen last year, and essentially brushed them aside in its Project Determination Letter of September 16, 2021. I fear that Mass Housing cannot be counted on to hold SLV's feet to the fire with regard to any conditions the ZBA may impose. Mr. Engler is likely to assert that some or all of such conditions would render his project uneconomical. This may be true on the face of it, but it's clear that the project's super-sized and shoe-horned scale is driven by the high price that he agreed to pay for the land, which is an extremely difficult site that most people thought had limited development potential: a steep, rocky hill nearly surrounded by wetlands, and with no proximate water and sewer utilities. The deeper truth is that the Town, not SLV, will live with and bear the costs of long-term externalities like traffic, pollution, and infrastructure wear and tear.

I dearly hope that this appalling and cynically conceived project can be stopped. Manchester's citizens and officials must continue working hard to protect the environment and character of the Town, while addressing its real and long neglected affordable housing needs.

Thank you all for your public service. I've been there in several seats and have a full appreciation for the difficult decision you're facing.

Sincerely,

Michael Dyer

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