

Town of Manchester-by-the-Sea, Massachusetts
Zoning Board of Appeals
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RE: SLV AFFORDABLE HOUSING PROJECT IN MANCHESTER-BY-
THE-SEA

My mother, born in Belfast, Ireland, was the eldest of 7 children. As soon as she finished Primary School she got a job to help support the family. She worked at many jobs including weaving Irish linen in a textile factory, working as a seamstress and working for the NAAFI during WWII. After the war she answered an ad in an Irish newspaper and sailed to Canada where she worked as a "domestic" (cook, maid, laundress and more) for a well-to-do family. There she met my father, a private in the Canadian Army and shortly thereafter they married. A year later I was born.

I was three years of age and my sister was two when we began our travels. Our first posting was to Germany where the Canadian Army was assisting with the rebuilding of Europe. There weren't enough PMQ's (on-base housing for soldiers with families) so we had to find housing on "the economy". The three years we were in Germany we lived in a medieval two-storey cottage with slate floors, damp stone walls with black mold, and no hot water. Saturday nights were bath nights, when my Mother would boil several pots of water on the stove and fill up the 10 gallon utility tub that hung on the back of the kitchen door the rest of the week. For the rest of the week our personal hygiene was done in the sink with cold water. Before leaving Europe my brother was born and my maternal grandfather died so my grandmother came to live with us, making us a family of six.

Every three years we were posted to another town or city, sometimes living on base in PMQ's but more frequently we had to search for affordable housing on the economy for our family of six. To make ends meet my mother made our clothes, cut our hair and held down jobs as a grocery cashier or cook.

My father was still in the army and moving the family around when I turned eighteen and left "home". You would think I'd settle down but it was not to be as my heart was set on becoming an actor. Consequently, I continued to move from place to place depending on where the next gig was. I have lived in roach infested city high-rises and I have lived in well-kept studio apartments in subdivided homes that kindly landlords rented at "reasonable" prices. I have lived in houses where a large group of us (actors and other artists) lived together and shared the expenses so we could afford decent housing in a decent neighborhood, and I have lived in government subsidized housing, that we, the residents, called "the projects". In between acting gigs I took other jobs such as dishwasher, cook, office temp, taxi driver and house painter, to name a few. Sometimes I held down more than one job at the same time to keep a roof over my head and food in my belly. And sometimes things got so bad I went hungry for a few weeks and slept on park benches or couch surfed at the homes of various friends and family.

I am not a lawyer or a politician or an urban planner or a land developer. I don't know anything about retaining walls or sewage waivers. What I do have is a lot of personal experience with "affordable housing" and in my humble opinion I don't think the SLV project is "affordable housing". But for the sake of argument let's say for the moment it is and that it's for humanitarian reasons some of us want it to be built. Then why would we, the residents of MBTS, want to offer those families needing affordable housing less welcoming, less safe, and less charming homes?

1. Why are we considering building "affordable housing" away from the town? Why are we segregating them? There is literally a highway separating "us" from "them"? That is exactly how I felt those years I lived in "the projects". I felt like the rest of the city didn't want us lower class people near them. I can tell you that most of the people I lived with in the projects were hard-working, kind, loving family people who would lend a hand or a buck to a neighbor.
2. And what does it say about how little we value the safety of the SLV "affordable housing" tenants when we are willing to waive safety standards to get this project done? A single narrow, steep road without sidewalks? Really? It will take just one fire to demonstrate how little we considered their safety. Either the residents won't be able to vacate the property by car, on foot or wheelchair because the emergency vehicles will be arriving; or the fire and ambulance vehicles won't be able to gain access because the residents are exiting. Then again, if the ambulances do get in they won't be able to get out with their patients. And if the fire takes place in the winter you have the issue of the emergency vehicles navigating up a steep, slippery road, as well as the issue of the blocked road stopping the residents from exiting to somewhere warm.
3. There are many who would love to live here in MBTS for a variety of reasons, the primary one, I believe, being its charm. The winding roads and lanes that bend themselves to the creeks and hills. The way the town contours itself around the seacoast's marshes and inlets and beaches. The open green areas that give us space to admire our quaint harbor's iconic fishing and sail boats, and from Masconomo Park we can look back across the harbor to the town skyline with First Parish Church, Congregational's brilliant white bell tower reaching for the heavens; historic Powder House Hill, a lovely conservation area that still dominates the middle of the town; the cedar shakes homes and the clapboard houses, the Victorian and Federalist buildings, with mansard rooves, widow's walks, cupolas, and mermaid weather vanes turning on a sea breeze. Is there no room on this side of the highway in the charming New England part of town for those needing affordable housing?
4. On the topic of MBTS's charm, one of the things many of my friends and family tell me upon visiting our little town is the long stretch of tree lined highway as they arrive via 128. It makes a great first impression. Two things will happen if the SLV project gets approved. Firstly, the top of Shingle Hill will be blasted off and the tree line will be cut revealing a hideous retaining wall and building. And secondly, MBTS will get its first traffic lights. If the SLV project is built on one side of School St and

- the Cell Signaling building with 500 employees goes up across the street, we'll have no recourse but to install traffic lights. Employees will be arriving to Cell Signaling at the same time parents and children will be exiting The Sanctuary to begin their day. That's hundreds of cars moving on School Street at the same time. And it will occur again at the end of the day. This will cause a backup onto 128 at Exit 50 as well as traffic backups on School Street on both sides of 128. If you are familiar with the backups in Danvers where 128 intersects 35 and 62 you have an idea what it will be like here. Sometimes the traffic gets so bad in Danvers that traffic is backed up in the right lane of 128 trying to exit on ramps 42 and 43.
5. This country and Europe just went through a record-breaking heatwave. Forest fires are raging out of control again. There are long term droughts across the global. Why are we here in MBTS considering waivers that could very well have a permanent detrimental effect on our water supply? The water we have here is currently only borderline clean. If we put even the tiniest of contaminants into our fresh water it will no longer be potable and we will be paying to transport clean water in. Shades of Flint, Michigan!
 6. Finally, let's be honest about the SLV Project. It is only an "affordable housing" project in the sense, that it meets Massachusetts 40B requirements. In the truest sense of the phrase "affordable housing" it is not. As a young actor I could not have afforded one of SLV's "affordable housing" units. The persons who delivered your mail and packages today could not afford an SLV "affordable housing" unit. The cashier who rang up your groceries at Crosby's yesterday could not afford one of these units unless he/she lived with 4 other cashiers all of them working 40 hour weeks. Nor could the local restaurant workers, landscapers, receptionists, drycleaners, and many other persons working in this town. Your child's teacher could not afford to live in one unless they had a significant other with a commensurate salary to make up the difference. Most persons on a fixed income such as a person on disability or a senior citizen on a pension could not afford this so-called "affordable housing".

I have heard that there is at least one landlord in this town that is renting truly "affordable housing" in the \$900 to \$2000 per month range. However, if this landlord wished to be considered a part of the 40B program they would need to evict their current tenants and put the units up for lottery. The landlord is not willing to do that to their long-standing tenants. Are there no other property owners or developers willing to assist us in meeting our B40 quota and at the same time offer **truly** affordable rents? Now I realize that a developer needs to make a profit on any new development but is there not a way to offer units at truly affordable rates and still make a profit on the other units? And is there truly no place on this side of 128 where these units could be developed? Are there no locations where vernal ponds, fresh water sources, wild life and green spaces could go unharmed?

In conclusion, as a 21 year resident of MBTS, and as an individual who has many years experience renting various types of "affordable housing" (on two continents), I am vehemently opposed to SLV's project, The Sanctuary. I realize that we are currently in a time where there is

a lot of money to be made in land development, and MBTS property is especially highly coveted. The irony is, the charm that makes MBTS such desirable property is the very thing that will be destroyed if developers are permitted to move ahead indiscriminately. I respectfully implore you to not support the SLV project in MBTS.

Sincerely

Kevin W. Prentice
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