

To: The Sherborn Select Board
From: The Sherborn Historical Commission
December 14, 2019

Historical Commission Comments - 41 N. Main Street Ch. 40B application

The application for a Ch. 40B development of 4 stories and 60 rental apartment units at 41 N. Main Street erroneously states that the property is not in a historic district. In fact, 41 N. Main Street is the centerpiece of the Edward's Plain-Dowse's Corner National Register District. Located where two major routes, Washington (Route 16) and North Main Street (Route 27) join, the 300 year-old Whitney-Paul House with its barns outbuildings and classic rural landscape are the first view of Sherborn as one enters from the east or the north and represent the heart of our small village center. Surrounded by apple orchards and boasting a classic New England view from the rocky hill pasture on the corner of North Main and Hunting Lane where the 4 story building would be sited, the property, also known as Hunting Lane Farm, is still readily recognizable as a complete 18th century landscape, a former inn, stage stop and tavern with its historic barn and other necessary surrounding outbuildings.

Although the developer has just separated out the house with a small amount of land from the rest of the proposal and designated them "for later development", the reason for doing so is probably the many development proposals that over the years have failed to win the support of Town Meeting and town boards because the house and outbuildings were slated to be moved and/or demolished. The developer may still intend that as the separation does not specify his intentions. It should be noted that the citizens have for many years supported the cultural and historic importance of the Whitney Paul House to the fabric of the village center and have, including the Planning Board and the Select Board, insisted that plans for all the contiguous parcels in one ownership be proposed at the same time and be considered together.

The House and its outbuildings reflect the appropriate scale and architectural style of a small New England village. A four-story 60 unit apartment building looming over them in such close proximity would be wholly inappropriate.

The Whitney-Paul House, a local landmark, was recommended for listing on the National Register of Historic Places with the 5+ acres of its farmstead, including barns and outbuildings. See Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System (MACRIS) numbers SHR 94, 285, 286 and 287 online. Massachusetts state law charges local historical commissions with using this information and the local Assets Survey forms to assist and advise local boards such as the Select Board and the Planning Board.

The history of this National Register property is significant and interwoven with the history of the town, as detailed on Form numbers 94, 285, 286 and 287 of the Sherborn Historic Assets Survey, which was compiled in 1981 by Edward Gordon and updated in 1999 by Sanford Johnson, professional historians following guidelines established by the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC). We include for your reference a hard copy of the Survey Form as part of your packet.

The age and significance of the house commonly known as the Whitney-Paul Tavern or Hunting Lane Farm is three-fold. Thought to contain an earlier dwelling built by Jonathan Whitney about 1680, it was probably enlarged in 1761 at the marriage of the Hon. Daniel Whitney to Miriam Leland. Daniel Whitney was a member of the provincial Congress of 1775 and later of the state convention to form the Federal constitution. Secondly, it was the home of Capt. Daniel Paul, a Newburyport sea captain, agent

for the Middlesex Fire Insurance Co. and licensed Inn Holder. Thirdly, as the Paul Tavern, it was a popular stop-over on the way to Boston, 21 miles to the east. It was the most centrally located of Sherborn's Taverns and was operated as a lodging house by the Paul family for 122 years (1824-1946). The property was the first one recognized by the Sherborn Historical Commission at the establishment of its Tercentenary House Program in 2016. The program, which has since honored other important survey properties of similar age, is ongoing and serves to educate the public about the early history and architecture of the town and the importance of historic preservation.

The 41 N. Main property visually represents our town's agrarian past establishes the character of our small center, providing an appropriate entrance to the village area. The development proposed is the first step in the developer's ultimate plan to replace this with a dense, multi-story housing development, some unspecified number and scale of retail buildings and large parking lots. Development at this site should preserve its historic context and setting, limit the overall scale, and retain as much of the natural topography as possible, including the small variations which, in the rest of Sherborn, reinforce the rural feeling of the town. We believe town boards, particularly the Select Board, Planning Board and those boards which protect the groundwater from which our wells draw, should require the plans for the entire 41 N. Main parcel be considered together.

We have over the years met with and sent letters to the Planning Board and the Select Board commenting on the various plans, both formal and informal, for 41 N. Main St. Any re-zoning or permitting of this site should prevent both the density and scale of this proposal in order to be visually consistent with the Whitney-Paul Tavern's setting and the National Register District that it anchors. This proposal crowds buildings into an even smaller site than the original 5 acre farmstead and would more than half cover it with buildings and pavement. It appears from the plans that with the grading of the site the building would be about 45 feet taller than the Whitney Paul Tavern a very short distance away. In sum, the Commission feels that, in scale, style and lack of regard for historic character of the area, its preservation and context, this development proposal is inappropriate and unacceptable.

We regard the Whitney-Paul House and its farmstead surroundings as a wonderful and prominent manifestation of Sherborn's history and thus deserving of the best protection we and the town can provide.

Sincerely,
Sherborn Historical Commission

Susie Wheelwright, Co-chair
Peggy Novak, Co-chair
Gene Goldfield, member and Treasurer
Jim Guarino, member
Ron Steffek, member and Historic District Commission Chair

xc. George Morrill, Chair, Sherborn Select Board
Chuck Yon, Vice Chair
Paul Derensis
Jeff Waldron
Eric Johnson
David Williams, Town Administrator

References: Sherborn Historic Assets Survey, forms 94, 285, 286, 287