

Monday, August 5, 2024

Dennis and Victoria Natale
32 Brush Hill Road
Sherborn, MA

Sherborn Zoning Board of Appeals
19 Washington Street
Sherborn, MA 01770

Re: Opposition to Proposed Development at 34 Brush Hill Rd

Dear Town of Sherborn Zoning Board of Appeals:

We would like to express our deep concerns and firm opposition to the proposed Chapter 40B development at 34 Brush Hill Road.

As 20-year residents at 32 Brush Hill Road and parents of 3 teenage children, we are intimately familiar with the neighborhood and surrounding area. The proposed housing development directly abuts our property on 2 sides. We understand and are generally compassionate to the objectives and mission of Chapter 40B; however, we believe this proposed development is wholly inappropriate in the requested location for the following reasons:

A.) Clean Water – Quality and Quantity

100% of Sherborn residents obtain their water from private wells. Brush Hill Road is no different. We are also entirely on septic. Therefore, it's imperative to have protections in place to ensure each resident has clean drinking water. Aside from our concerns about water quality, we are also concerned about water quantity. We have been confronted with water shortages from our well in the past. It's my understanding clean ground water beneath Sherborn is not abundant and wells in Sherborn run dry with some frequency. We have recent personal experience with a poorly performing well. At substantial time and expense, we were forced to re-drill our well quite deep to reach a reliable and high-quality water supply for our home.

The General Chemical toxic waste site on Leland Street in Framingham causes many concerns. It's located less than one-mile from the proposed development at 34 Brush Hill Road. General Chemical polluted the groundwater with known carcinogens and other hazardous substances. It also contaminated residential properties near General Chemical resulting in the demolition of four homes in 2020. Former Framingham City Councilor Judith Grove expressed "the next step for the neighborhood (after demolition) is cleaning up the pollution still spreading underground from the General Chemical facility", which closed in 2014.

Groundwater flow is extremely difficult to know for certain, because it can follow rock structures which are impossible to fully map from the surface. The hazardous contaminants from General Chemical have leached into groundwater, are highly mobile, and can travel long distances. Pumping water from wells draws water toward each pump, which may also draw groundwater contaminants towards this proposed development and to pumps in the surrounding area – specifically toward our home, and the homes of our neighbors on Brush Hill Road. The proposed development must take this issue into serious consideration in its entirety.

(B.) Potential for Septic Infiltration – Ground Water and Drinking Water

The proposed development site failed the groundwater elevation test for septic permit application. The proposed site also abuts wetlands on three sides. The high-water table at this location raises substantial concerns about how the septic from the proposed housing development will impact the groundwater. The reasons for performing both a perc test and groundwater elevation test are to help ensure the integrity of Sherborn's limited supply of groundwater. I would also highlight that any contamination of our present clean drinking water would leave us with no alternate source of water. Sherborn does not offer municipal water anywhere.

(C.) 34 Brush Hill Road – Front Property Line

Our home at 32 Brush Hill Road was constructed in 1962 on Lot 3, a plan endorsed as Approval Not Required ("ANR") by the Sherborn Planning Board ("1962 ANR Plan"). The 1962 plan showed frontage along a curved portion of Brush Hill Road. After we purchased our property, we discovered the description of Lot 3 on the 1962 ANR Plan had an error. The previous plan, a 1955 plan, also endorsed by the Sherborn Planning Board as "Approval Not Required: ("1955 ANR Plan") created the parent lot from which Lot 3 was later divided. The 1955 ANR plan established the front line with reference to the 1951 County Layout of Brush Hill Road that was never actually effectuated. As a result, Lot 3 on the 1962 ANR Plan did not extend all the way to the edge of Brush Hill Road, thus creating a slice of land/property we did not own. We subsequently obtained release of deeds to the small portion of land that connects our property to Brush Hill Road, but this was complicated and time consuming. 34 Brush Hill Road may face a similar issue, and may not abut Brush Hill Road in the same manner as our property. If so, this issue must be considered and addressed.

(D.) Safety – Brush Hill Road Width

Brush Hill Road is old and narrow and served as a farm road the early 1900's, and possibly earlier. Massachusetts designated Brush Hill Road as a "scenic road" in 1974. This designation has implications with respect to maintenance and removal of trees, as well as stone walls. Brush Hill Road is also extremely narrow, and measures 15 feet at some spots, with the narrowest at 14 feet, 9 inches which barely allows two vehicles to pass each other. Our road becomes even more narrow during snow season, and we occasionally pull into snowbanks when faced with oncoming vehicles. Typical commercial vehicle width is 9 feet. Ambulances and fire trucks range between 9 and 10 feet wide. At the location of the planned access driveway for the proposed development, Brush Hill Road is 15 feet wide. Also, there are stone walls and several old growth trees along both sides of Brush Hill Road at the location of the planned access road.

The narrow width of Brush Hill Road would offer challenges in the best of conditions (non-winter) for emergency vehicles turning onto the proposed access road. I would highlight that Brush Hill Road is also a fairly tricky and winding road, with several blind curves.

Our other concern is that the addition of more homes, plus the 16+ motor vehicles associated with the proposed homes will further increase the traffic load on this narrow country road. We believe this will contribute to the existing perils of walking, biking and driving on Brush Hill Road.

(E.) Conclusion

For the reasons cited above, and many more, 34 Brush Hill Road is an inappropriate choice for the proposed housing development. The extensive and serious threats to our safe drinking water, increase in vehicle traffic, numerous public safety concerns, loss of biodiverse green space, as well as the numerous concerns expressed by The Sherborn Select Board in January 2020 about similar 40B projects with comparable profiles must also be considered when evaluating this project.

Clearly, the proposed development at 34 Brush Hill Road presents a situation where the abundant concerns and risks are substantially greater than fulfilling a 40B housing quota in this location.

Respectfully offered for your consideration,

Dennis and Victoria Natale

Brush Hill Road – Typical Widths

* Note: For reference, a Jeep Wrangler is 7 feet wide not including the mirrors

