

DATE: June 10, 2025

TO: Newbury Planning Board Members  
Kristen Grubbs, Newbury Planning Director

FROM: Martha L. Taylor, AIA  
Newbury Planning Dept. - Special Projects Manager

RE: Architectural Review  
MBTA Zoning Residential Development  
34 Central Street, Byfield, MA  
Applicant: MHOC LLC

As requested, I have reviewed the architectural components of MHOC's Site Plan Review Application for a 44-unit multi-family residential development at 34 Central Street, Byfield, against the provisions of Newbury's MBTA Communities Multi-Family Overlay District (MCMOD) Bylaw and offer the following comments. Section numbers below refer to § 97-4.G. MBTA Communities Overlay District (MCMOD) of Newbury's Zoning Bylaw, Chapter 97, as adopted by Town Meeting on April 30, 2024.

1. § 97-4.G.(5) Dimensional Standards: The proposed development lies within Subdistrict South-B of the MCMOD – comments below are based on the dimensional standards for that Subdistrict:
  - a. Height: The proposed structures are in compliance with the height requirements of the MCMOD for Subdistrict South-B. The tallest of the proposed structures is 2.5 stories, with a maximum height of 34'-0" to top of roof, one foot below the maximum allowable roof height of 35'-0". It should be noted, however, that all the buildings are shown on the architectural drawings as sitting on level ground – if there is any grade variation at the base of the buildings, the height of the tallest structures may need to be revisited.
  - b. Lot Coverage: Sheet 6 ("Site Plan A") of the plan set states that the Open Space is 5.62 acres, which is 56% of the total lot area of 10.01 acres and therefore exceeds the required 50% minimum open space. Per the Bylaw, maximum building coverage is 40% of the lot area – percentage of building coverage for the proposed development is not shown and should be provided. Further, the area included in the Open Space should be clearly delineated on the site plan to ensure that it is made of up "contiguous undeveloped land within [the] parcel boundary," as required by the Bylaw.
  - c. Setbacks: A line which appears to depict the front, side, and rear setbacks is shown on the site plan on Sheet 6, but is not identified as such, and no dimensions are shown – this information should be provided on the plans. From scaling the site plan, all the structures appear to comply with the Bylaw setback requirements of 50' for front yard setback and 60' for side yard and rear yard setbacks, but this should be confirmed.

- d. Density: The Bylaw allows a maximum of 8 units/acre for developments which lie within Subdistrict South-B of the MCMOD, which translates to a maximum of 80 units for this 10.01-acre parcel. The Applicant is proposing to construct 44 units, well within the maximum allowed.
  - e. Parking: The Bylaw requires one parking space for one-bedroom and studio units and two parking spaces for units with two or more bedrooms. Between garage and driveway parking, all units have at least two parking spaces.
2. § 97-4.(6) Affordability requirement:
- a. The Applicant is proposing to provide four affordable units, in compliance with the Bylaw, which requires 10% of the housing units in a development of 10 or more dwelling units to be affordable.
  - b. The “Fiscal Impact Analysis” states that all four affordable units will be two-bedroom units. However, the Board might want to ask the Applicant to consider providing at least one affordable unit for each unit size – for example, one affordable one-bedroom unit, two affordable two-bedroom units, and one affordable three-bedroom unit.
  - c. There is no indication of whether the project will be phased, and if so, how many phases there will be and which structures will be included in each phase. If the structures are to be built in phases, anticipated phasing should be shown on the plans and the affordable units should be clearly identified and distributed among those phases, at least one per phase.
  - d. Some additional questions for consideration: How will owners be selected for the affordable units? Will there be a lottery? And will any preference be given to current Newbury residents?
3. § 97-4.(8) Design Standards:
- a. Intent:
    - i. In general, the architectural design of the buildings complies with the intent of the architectural Design Standards, which is to utilize “[b]uilding styles and materials [which] reflect the vernacular styles of traditionally settled areas of Newbury and other similar communities in the region.” The proposed “modern farmhouse” style, which is currently popular for single-family residential construction in this area, uses elements reflective of local residential architecture, including both clapboard and board and batten siding, pitched asphalt shingle roofs, peaked dormers, double hung windows, entry porches, etc.
    - ii. It should be noted, however, that while the Design Standards call for the “natural topography of the site [to be] preserved and integrated into the site design to the greatest extent possible,” some substantial cuts are being proposed to accommodate the site design. The cuts are greatest in the area of the 11-series, 12-series, and 13-series units, where the grade will be brought down from el. 90’ to el. 74’, i.e. a 16-foot cut. Is it

possible to revise the layout so that it integrates better with the natural topography of the site?

b. Building and structure placement:

- i. As noted above, some substantial cuts in grade are being made to accommodate the site layout and building placement, which is not consistent with the intent that the site design work with the existing topography to the greatest extent possible.
- ii. The Bylaw calls for the visual impact of the development from the street to be minimized “by locating lower buildings closest to the street frontage and taller buildings in the interior of the parcels.” However, based on the site plan and architectural drawings prepared by Gavin and Sullivan Architects, Inc., it appears that a building containing “A Units,” which, at 34’-0” to top of roof, are the tallest in the development, are immediately on the left as one enters the site from Central Street. In general, more clarity regarding the architectural drawings and coordination between the buildings and the site design is needed – see comments below.

c. Building massing, articulation, and architecture:

- i. Architecture: Through the use of the “modern farmhouse” style for all the buildings, the architectural design of the structures demonstrates “cohesive planning of the development” and presents “a clearly identifiable design feature throughout,” as called for in the Bylaw. With reference to the specific design standards:
  1. The perceived mass of the buildings has been reduced by dividing the building façades into smaller scale horizontal and vertical components, using changes in plane and changes in color, material, and texture. Specifically, changes in plane between some of the units and use of various architectural elements such as dormers, second story overhangs, two different siding types (clapboard and board-and-batten), small entry porches with columns, and changes in siding color all provide visual interest and reduce the perceived mass of the buildings.
  2. Primary building entrances are accentuated through the use of small entry porches, as well as the use of an accent color for the front doors.
  3. Pitches for the main roofs and peaked dormers range from 8:12 to 12:12, consistent with the Bylaw requirements. The roof pitch on the shed dormers is 3:12, which is not atypical. Where porch roofs are peaked, the pitch varies from 8:12 to 12:12. No pitch has been provided for the entry porches with shed roofs – this should be shown.
  4. The side and rear façades of the structures are generally consistent with the primary façade’s architectural style.
  5. No accessory buildings are proposed, so the requirement regarding accessory building style is not applicable.

6. The architectural drawings provided do not show any mechanical equipment at grade. If any condensers for AC or heat pump units or other mechanical equipment will be located outside, they will need to be screened from view.
  7. No utility, service, loading, or trash collection areas have been shown. If they are provided, they will need to be screened from view or enclosed as required.
- ii. Building materials:
1. Siding: The Bylaw calls for materials such as brick, stone, wood clapboard, and cementitious siding (such as Hardie Plank) for exterior cladding. The exterior materials the Applicant is proposing are generally consistent with this standard – the elevations show Hardie Plank horizontal siding for significant portions of the exterior walls, with stone veneer at the base. For the board and batten siding, however, the Applicant is proposing a PVC product by Azek instead of the Hardie equivalent, which would match the horizontal siding – a rationale for this “substitution” should be provided. Trim (such as cornerboards, horizontal trim boards, and fascia boards) is proposed to be Azek (PVC), which is commonly used as a long-lasting, maintenance-free trim option. No materials have been specified for exterior decks and stairs and should be provided. Similarly, manufacturer and materials of the “white cottage style garage doors” should be provided. Final decisions will need to be made regarding texture of the siding (smooth or wood-grain) and the proposed colors for siding, exterior doors, stone veneer, shutters, etc. It will be helpful to receive physical samples of each material and color specified.
  2. Roofing: The drawings call for “architectural grade asphalt shingles” for the roofs, in compliance with the Bylaw. Specifications for the roofing (manufacturer, specific line, length of warranty, etc.) should be provided. In addition, the Board may want the Applicant to provide color options in addition to black, which will be the most heat absorbent.
  3. Exterior Lighting: The Bylaw calls for resource efficient materials, including lighting (LED and Dark Sky compliant light fixtures), with a color temperature not to exceed 3000K. A photometric plan has been included with the drawings, along with catalogue numbers for proposed wall-mounted and pole-mounted fixtures. Catalogue cuts of each of the specified fixtures need to be provided to ensure that they meet the Bylaw requirements.

4. Additional Architectural Comments:

- a. There are inconsistencies between the architectural drawings and other documents in the submission that need to be addressed. In particular:

- i. The “Fiscal Impact Analysis” gives the unit breakdown as 5 one-bedroom market rate units, 28 two-bedroom market rate and 4 two-bedroom affordable units, for a total of 32 two-bedroom units, and 7 three-bedroom market rate units. However, the table at the top of the architectural site plan states that there are 4 one-bedroom units, 34 two-bedroom units, and 6 three-bedroom units. This discrepancy needs to be reconciled.
  - ii. Distances between some of the buildings on the architectural site plan appear to be as small as 10’-0”, whereas on Sheet 6 (“Site Plan A”) all the buildings appear to be at least 20’- 0” apart. Spacing between buildings should comply with any requirements the Fire Department has for the minimum distance needed between buildings to ensure access for fire apparatus to all sides of each structure.
- b. The actual proposed unit types are not clear from the architectural drawings provided. The architectural set entitled “Unit A” shows four different unit layouts – 3 three-bedroom units, each with a different layout, and 1 two-bedroom unit. Which of these is intended to be “Unit A”? The set entitled “Unit B” shows 1 one-bedroom unit and 2 two-bedroom units – which of these is “Unit B”? The untitled set showing “Unit Type C” depicts 4 two-bedroom units – are these intended to be the typical two-bedroom units?
- c. In addition, the architectural site plan is unclear. The color-coded legend at the top of this plan shows three colors – yellow for the one-bedroom units, light blue for the two-bedroom units, and red for the three-bedroom units. However, the plan itself, in addition to yellow and red, has two different shades of blue, the darker of which is called out as “A” and the lighter of which is labelled as “B” on some buildings and “C” on others. Are these all intended to be two-bedroom units? If so, what are the differences between the three?
- d. The sections through the “Unit A” and “Unit C” buildings indicate that these buildings are slab on grade. However, the section through the “Unit B” building shows a full basement, accessed by an interior stair. Are these “B” units in fact intended to have a full basement below grade?
- e. On Sheet 6 (“Site Plan A”) of the drawing set, it appears that parts of Building 2 and Building 3 fall within the 50’ buffer for the wetland along the northwesterly property boundary. In addition, all of Buildings 1, 2, and 3, and part of Building 4 are within the 100’ buffer. Has a Notice of Intent been submitted to the Conservation Commission for all work proposed within the buffer zone? (Note: Lines apparently designating the 50’ and 100’ buffers are shown on the plan, but have not been identified – they should be identified on any future revision of the drawings).

5. Miscellaneous Comments:

- a. The Applicant’s name and address are not shown on the Title Sheet and also do not appear in the title block on a number of the sheets in the drawing set. This

Applicant information should be added to the Title Sheet and all drawings in any future revisions of the drawing set.

- b. In his letter, Mr. Serwatka noted several references to New Hampshire (such as NHDOT) which need to be revised or deleted. In addition, Note 12 on Sheet 6 refers to a clubhouse which will be subject to annual review by the Brentwood Fire Department. There is no clubhouse shown on the drawings and this project is not in Brentwood – this note should be deleted.
- c. Note 11 on Sheet 6 states that the road will be a public way. Since this is a condominium development, it is anticipated that the road will remain private and will not at any time be offered to the Town for acceptance as a public way. As the Fiscal Impact Analysis states, access ways will be maintained by the owners – this will need to be clearly stated in the Condominium Association documents.
- d. As noted above, lines on the plans depicting setbacks, wetland buffers, the extent of Zone II/Water Supply Protection District, etc., should all be labeled.

If you have any questions regarding the above comments, please let me know.