

Central New Hampshire Regional Planning Commission

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TO: Warner Planning Board
FROM: CNHRPC staff
DATE: August 19, 2022
RE: Comet LLC Workforce Housing

I. Site Statistics

Owner: Comet, LLC

Address: NH Route 103

Proposal: Site plan for 24-unit workforce housing project

Total Site Area: 13.8 acres

Existing Zoning: C-1, Commercial, Intervale Overlay District

Surrounding Uses: Commercial, institutional, and conservation

II. Background Information

The subject property was created with a three-lot subdivision recorded in 2003. It appears that the other two lots shown on the plan were previously given site plan approval, as the drive-through restaurant (Dunkins) has already been constructed. The existing conditions plan should be updated to reflect the new construction. Staff comments will relate primarily to Lot 3, which is the site of a proposed workforce housing project. The use requires a special exception from the Zoning Board of Adjustment, which is currently under review. Most of this property is encumbered by easements, including an 11.2-acre conservation easement which contains substantial areas of wet meadows that fall within the floodway and floodplain of the Warner River.

III. Project Description

The proposal is to construct a three-story, 29,700 square foot multifamily building with a total of 24 units. The project also includes a drive aisle connecting to the Dunkin Donuts' driveway and sixty new parking spaces with associated drainage improvements. Additional landscaping and lighting are also shown in the plan set.

Staff reviewed the plans provided as they relate to the Warner Zoning Ordinance and Site Plan Review Regulations, as well as to State regulations and best planning practices. It was unclear whether or not the Planning Board previously approved parts of this project, as it appears to be phased with access to NH Rt.

103 already established. Please ignore comments that have already been addressed with past decisions of the Board.

The main access point to the site from Route 103 has been constructed and leads directly to the existing Dunkin Donuts restaurant. A second access point with limited turning movement has also been constructed for the proposed retail building. Pedestrian and vehicular access for the new residential building is proposed via a new sidewalk and drive aisle from Dunkin Donuts. This layout does raise the possibility of conflicts and it is suggested that the Board require the applicant to submit a traffic study to be reviewed by the Town Engineer.

Careful consideration should be given to pedestrian traffic for housing projects, and it is recommended that a more direct route be provided for those walking to businesses on the other side of Route 103. A connection to the public sidewalk on the north side of Route 103 and a crosswalk at North Road could achieve this and put residents a few steps closer to a connection to the downtown. Bump-outs, or some other traffic-calming measure could also directly help to address the traffic impact from the project. Trails as a recreational amenity and a secondary means of access for emergency vehicles may also be warranted. Finally cross access easements should be required for any shared access on separate lots, regardless of current ownership.

The proposed site drainage is primarily a closed system that is ultimately directed downslope toward the river. A drainage study was not provided. Site grading and drainage are reviewed as part of the State's alteration of terrain (AOT) permit, but it is recommended that the plans be reviewed by an engineer representing the Town's interests. Likewise, connections to Town utilities, streets, and other public infrastructure should be reviewed by the Town Engineer.

Details provided for landscaping (Site Plan Section XVII), lighting (Section XXI), building design (Section XXII) and signs (Section XXIV) were somewhat limited and it was not possible to determine full compliance. The Board should review the respective sections of the site plan regulations to determine what additional information might be needed. The landscaping proposed does seem somewhat sparse and may not provide an adequate buffer for the residential use. The trees and plants installed for the restaurant site do not appear to meet the minimum specifications in the regulations; an inspection is recommended prior to the issuance of certificate of occupancy for the housing project. Photometrics and lighting fixture details were not provided; the Town's regulations require review by a lighting engineer to ensure compliance. A materials list was not included with the building design, and it appears that the front façade does exceed the maximum length without fenestration. Information was not provided regarding a property identification sign. No waivers were requested with the application.

IV. Recommendations

1. The Board should consider whether or not to accept jurisdiction of the application under RSA 676:4 and Section VIII(G) of the Warner Site Plan Review Regulations.
2. The Board should consider whether or not the proposal is a development of regional impact under RSA 36:56.
3. Findings of fact should be drafted and should accompany any Board decision.
4. Please consider requiring a traffic study that includes an evaluation of on-site circulation.
5. Review of plans by Town Engineer is recommended.
6. Consider improving pedestrian access with a public sidewalk connection and crosswalk at North Road, along with traffic-calming at the crosswalk.
7. The Town should have representation at all meetings with NHDOT regarding site access.
8. A secondary access for emergency vehicles may be warranted.
9. Consider requiring trail construction on conservation land as a recreational amenity.
10. Additional landscaping may be warranted as a buffer between residential and commercial uses.
11. A lighting plan with photometrics should be reviewed by an engineer per Town regulations.
12. Easements should be required for shared access on separate lots regardless of current ownership; all easements and other legal documents should be reviewed by town counsel prior to recording.
13. All federal, state, and local permits should be in place prior to the commencement of site development.
14. A financial guarantee should be required for all public improvements.
15. A site inspection should be made prior to the issuance of a certificate of occupancy to ensure compliance with the plan.