

February 21, 2023

James D. Rabbitt, AICP, Planning Director
South Kingstown Planning Department
180 High Street
Wakefield, RI 02879

RE: Comprehensive Permit Master Plan Submission – TRC Concerns
South County Commons – District 5 Apartments
South Kingstown, RI
DE Project #: 0267-059-A08

Dear Mr. Rabbitt:

DiPrete Engineering, on behalf of and in collaboration with the applicant, is providing the following written responses to the twelve (12) items to be addressed with the Planning Board as outlined by the Technical Review Committee (TRC) from the meeting on December 14, 2022. Our responses have generally been addressed at different times in discussion at the meetings or by subsequent submissions. However, we thought that it may be helpful to provide this summary so the responses from the applicant are clear even if some of this information is redundant. Of course, we will continue to address comments from the staff, board members and public as they surface. The original comments are provided in *italics* with responses in bold.

1. *The request for waivers for parking and the implications for future residents and visitors to the property.*

DiPrete Engineering provided a Supplemental Parking Analysis dated December 7, 2022, which included the supporting research and technical justification to qualify the request for reduced parking. In summary, the parking analysis evaluated data from 3 categories:

- 1) Published Studies by the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) for parking requirements for suburban midrise apartments by unit and by bedroom, and parking demands for business class hotels.
- 2) Observed/actual parking counts of a similar apartment project in North Kingstown, and for the Fairfield Inn on the subject property.
- 3) Interviews of apartment managers and the hotel manager for what they believe their needs are and trends they are seeing in their industry.

The results of the study show that:

- 1) After the proposed apartments and additional apartment parking is built, the South County Commons District 5 campus will have excess parking of about 36 spaces given the real world demands.
- 2) When the use of the 3rd building (eastern front pad site) is known, the shared parking allowance as spelled out in the Route 1 Special Management District zoning should be re-evaluated against the actual demands existing at that time. As of now, the use of the 3rd building is unknown, and the applicant is no longer pursuing the restaurant that was envisioned in 2018. The applicant understands that it will have to return to the Planning Board for review of the architecture and parking needs for this building prior to construction.

The applicant also believes that the town's zoning requirement for parking for multi-family housing is overly simplistic, outdated, and punitive for projects such as the one being proposed. The ordinance requires the same amount of parking regardless of the type of units being built or the characteristics of the future residents. In essence, the ordinance requires the same amount of parking if the development was all 3-bedroom units as it does if the development was all 1-bedroom units. Many towns in RI have updated their parking requirements to address the likely parking demands for residents who live in 1-bedroom units, 2-bedroom units, and 3-bedroom units recognizing that there is a relationship between bedrooms, the characteristic of the likely resident, and parking demands. As a point of example, attached is the ordinance and a parking calculation from the neighboring town of North Kingstown which demonstrates this level of analysis. In North Kingstown, a parking waiver would not be required for the project being proposed. The applicant believes that following the South Kingstown parking ordinance will result in the construction of unnecessary parking, unnecessary and wasted construction and maintenance expense, and an increase of unnecessary impervious area and associated stormwater management to mitigate the effects. Ed Pimentel, AICP (Certified Planner) and Paul Bannon of BETA Group (Traffic Engineer) will provide additional testimony as to the more appropriate parking allocation and standard for this type of use at the upcoming Planning Board meeting.

- 2. The implications on the use of shared parking with a previously approved project that utilized parking now targeted for residential/apartment use. The applicant may need to amend the previously approved development plan to modify their approved parking scenario.*

The pending application for Master Plan anticipates a new Master Plan decision for this parcel. At a later date, the applicant will be submitting an application for Preliminary Plan approval, and eventually an application for Final Plan approval. The future Final Plan approval will supersede and modify the existing Master Plan Approval, Preliminary Plan Approval, and Final Plan approval. It is the same parcel of land with the same owners as the previous application and there is nothing unusual about an owner amending an approval or seeking modifications or new land use approvals for their property. This has already been done several times in South County Commons as uses changed from industrial to hotels, and retail to service. The applicant also acknowledges that the Route 1 SMD zoning ordinance and the pending Master Plan application make use of shared parking, driveways, utilities, stormwater management, and signage between the hotel, the proposed multi-family building, and the future 3rd building. The use of the 3rd building is as of now unknown, and the applicant will be required to return to the town for review and approval if that building ever goes forward. The applicant understands that it will be required to document and justify the adequacy of the parking and other shared infrastructure as well as for an architectural review at that time. The Supplemental Parking Analysis dated December 7, 2022 which included supporting research and technical justification shows that there will be excess parking available for the hotel and proposed multi-family project and recommends that the parking demands be analyzed again when the use of the 3rd building is known. The analysis included an interview with the hotel manager (who is also a co-applicant) with regard to the actual parking demand for the hotel and demonstrates how these two uses can co-exist with shared parking within the District 5 campus.

- 3. Addressing adequate landscaping associated with general landscaping and screening the proposed structure from Route 1 and abutting properties.*

The Master Plan site plans include a view corridor analysis on Sheet 6 (Site Views and Elevations), which shows the approximate view of the proposed building from Route 1. The applicant will provide a more comprehensive Landscape Plan at the Preliminary Plan stage that provides the specific details for proposed landscaping and screening. Landscape details will include but not be limited to the quantity, location, sizing, and species of the proposed plantings. Although there is no requirement that buildings be invisible or totally buffered from Route 1, the proposed building is located over 650' from Route 1 and generally behind other buildings and landscaping. The applicant is committed to meeting or exceeding the Route 1 SMD landscape requirements and will be presenting this at the Preliminary Plan stage of review. No waivers have been requested for landscaping, screening, or buffering.

4. *Addressing the lack of active and/or passive recreational opportunities for residents of the facility.*

The applicant provided a "Pedestrian Circulation & Open Space Use Plan" that details the conceptual locations for passive or active recreational areas. The applicant proposes to use a combination of passive recreation and landscaped open space as detailed on the plan. The applicant will provide a comprehensive Landscape Plan at the Preliminary Plan stage that provides the specific details for the active and passive recreation areas. Details will include but not be limited to the location of active and passive recreational areas, proposed amenities within the active recreational area, and square footage/area of each recreation type. The original Master Plan approved a minimum of 4.07 acres of usable open space for South County Commons District 5. The applicant is proposing 6.94 acres of usable open space, which is 70% greater than the minimum. We are not aware of a specific requirement for providing a higher level of detail of the active/passive open space uses at Master Plan stage, but are committed to providing such details at the appropriate stage of Preliminary Plan when the finish grading, utility locations, and final building design is known.

5. *Address the over reliance on the automobile and develop a traffic/transportation plan that can support alternatives to automobile. The site is located south of the Town's 2nd largest retail/commercial development and the development has planned no interconnection. The Developer should explore an interconnection between the two significant developments. Connections along the Route 1 ROW and/or within the Route 1 Right of Way (ROW) should be explored.*

The proposed project is about a 5-minute drive to the town's two largest commercial areas (Wakefield and South County Commons). It will be closer to these commercial areas than the vast majority of the residences in the town. The applicant believes that the location will be looked at as desirable by the future market rate and affordable residents. That said, the applicant also believes that the future residents will have automobiles and use them to get to Wakefield or South County Commons. This section of Route 1 has a freeway cross-section and is not suitable for pedestrians. There is no ability to connect the site to South County Commons because of private property in between (owned by Life Span) and extensive wetlands. The applicant has contacted Life Span on several occasions including recently with the Master Plan submission and they have consistently said that they do not believe it is appropriate to allow the public to cross the school property. The applicant also believes that the distances are beyond what most people would want to walk.

The location off of Route 1 in the Special Management District and close to Wakefield and South County Commons make the site attractive for the proposed multi-family use, but it is

clearly a suburban location and the applicant believes there is likely to be at least 1 vehicle per unit and that the residents will use their private vehicles to access services like most South Kingstown residents. The applicant understands the Planning Board's desire to have residents being able to walk to services such as in a city or town center, but the location of this property and other physical parameters make it more suitable for residents who will drive.

6. *The developer should show all alternative plans explored as it relates to modifying the buildings size and/or building multiple smaller buildings. The applicant should explain the rationale for the bulk/scale of the proposed structure verses other alternatives.*

The proposed building size is compatible to the area and about the same size as the closest building (the Fairfield Inn). The applicant has explored other uses for this property over the past 10 years and one of them was another hotel which is a permitted use under the current Master Plan and would be about the same size as the proposed multi-family building. This will not be the largest building in the Route 1 SMD and the size is appropriate for this location and what could be built if the multi-family building was not being pursued. The proposed building is the minimum size necessary to achieve the 70 proposed 1 and 2 bedroom residential units.

The applicant did evaluate residential developments of different sizes for this property over the past 10 years and determined that they would not be viable or financeable. It is the recent increase in market rate rents that caused the applicant to reassess the viability of the development about 18 months ago when it began the current planning. Since then, the increase in construction costs and interest rates have challenged some of the original positive conclusions. This is a privately funded residential development and it is not seeking nor eligible for government financial subsidies. It will need to be deemed economically viable by commercial lenders and the applicant believes that fewer than 70 units (52 market rate and 18 affordable) will reduce the proposed revenue below that level. A basic premise for understanding the viability of this project is: It was considered viable at 70 units before recent construction and financing cost increases; the economic viability will be reassessed after all regulatory approvals are in place and when the banks are ready to make a final commitment; a project with fewer than 70 units is not likely to be viable and the applicant would not likely pursue it.

Also attached is a copy of the 1998 approved Master Plan that is valid today. The plan has been edited for the purposes of showing the proposed and future District 5, and the other built residential developments part of South County Commons. The plan shows that the proposed density for this project in District 5 is comparable to the density for the constructed developments in District 2, District 3, and District 6. District 5 is part of the same 151 acre parcel as the other districts, received its Master Plan approval on the same day, and all of the districts were considered by the town to be part of the Rte 1 SMD, North District.

7. *The applicant should explore all options associated with reducing impervious surfaces associated with travel ways, parking and walkways with innovative technology and design.*

In collaboration with the Conservation Commission's recommendations, the applicant is committed to evaluating alternative pervious surfaces (i.e. pavers/porous pavement) with the detailed engineering/design for the Preliminary Plan submission. Additional stormwater calculations and details will be provided with the Preliminary Plan submission. Not proposing

unnecessary parking or parking beyond 1 unit per bedroom is one method that the applicant has utilized to reduce impervious surfaces.

8. *The applicant shall demonstrate how any proposed open space adds value to the community verses just being land that is left over and not developable.*

The Route 1 SMD zoning ordinance has a lengthy section on Open Space. The original Master Plan that is currently approved, and this new Master Plan application exceed that requirement. No waivers are being requested to reduce Open Space. The applicant provided a “Pedestrian Circulation & Open Space Use Plan” that details the conceptual locations for passive or active recreation areas that goes beyond the zoning ordinance requirements. The applicant proposes to use a combination of passive recreation and landscaped open space as detailed on the plan. The applicant will provide a more comprehensive Landscape Plan at the Preliminary Plan stage that provides the specific details for the active and passive recreation areas. Details will include the location of active and passive recreational areas, proposed amenities within the active recreational area, and square footage/area of each recreation type. The original Master Plan approved a minimum of 4.07 acres of usable open space for South County Commons District 5. The applicant is proposing 6.94 acres of usable open space, which is 70% greater than the minimum. We are not aware of a specific requirement for providing a higher level of detail of the Open Space functionality at Master Plan stage, but are committed to providing such details at the appropriate stage of Preliminary Plan.

9. *The applicant shall address traffic associated with the proposed development and the implications on abutting development.*

The applicant has provided a supplemental traffic letter from BETA Group dated January 23, 2023, which demonstrates the reduction in traffic/trips from the previously approved 6,500 SF restaurant. In summary, based upon the change of use to a 70 unit multi-family building from the 6,500 SF restaurant use that was previously approved for this site by the town and the RI DOT, it is anticipated there will be 378 less daily trips, 36 less AM Peak Hour trips, and 31 less PM Peak Hour trips. The roadways and intersections were originally designed for higher impact uses. The capacity was reassessed when the currently approved plan was proposed in 2017 and it was demonstrated that there was excess capacity. The currently proposed use even further reduces the traffic being generated on the site.

10. *The applicant shall explore additional interconnections (pedestrian/bike) with abutting properties/developments in addition to internal circulation.*

The applicant has explained that there is no ability to connect District 5 of South County Commons to the other districts. This has been evaluated and determined not to be feasible since before the approval of the 1998 master plan. There were meetings between the applicant, town officials, and representatives of the RI DEM at that time and it was discussed extensively prior to the Planning Board approving District 5 with no connection to the other districts in 1998. In 2017 it was reevaluated, and it was again reevaluated in 2022. There are extensive and high value wetlands between the districts which are regulated by the RI DEM and US Army Corps of Engineers. An alteration suitable for public circulation through the wetlands is beyond what the applicant could achieve, or this project warrants. In addition, since 1998 Bradley School (Life Span) has acquired the property between the applicant’s site and South County Commons. Life Span has consistently said that they do not believe it is appropriate to allow the public to cross the school property.

Route 1 in this area has a freeway cross-section with a median divider and no access on the west side except at the traffic signals. It is not an area suitable for sidewalks, bike paths, or pedestrian circulation. Any upgrades to Route 1 are beyond what the applicant could sponsor and would be up to the RI DOT. This section of Route 1 is now regulated as a scenic highway and any alterations would have to consider this. Also, the distance between the proposed multi-family building and the services in South County Commons and Wakefield put it beyond what the applicant believes most people would regularly walk, and a pedestrian connection would not likely to be frequently used.

The town's Comprehensive Plan in place when South County Commons was approved and the original Route 1 SMD zoning anticipated a public roadway from Kelley Way to the traffic signal at the Government Center. When the Wakefield Meadows development was approved, the public road requirement was eliminated by the Wakefield Meadows applicant and the Planning Board in favor of private roads. It is up to the owners of Wakefield Meadows if they wish to allow the residents of this project to walk or ride bikes on their roads. The frequency of use could likely be evaluated by understanding how often the residents at the north end of Wakefield Meadows walk or ride bicycles to Wakefield. Either way, the applicant does not believe that a pedestrian connection through Wakefield Meadows or another property is warranted or necessary for this development. The proposed design anticipates vehicles for each unit, and the travel distances to community services are appropriate for driving.

11. All light shall be kept at a minimum and dark sky compliant.

The applicant has not requested any waivers/relief from the town lighting ordinance and will adhere to all local regulations in regard to lighting.

12. Provisions for water and sewer shall be solidified prior to application to the Planning Board.

The applicant has provided Will Serve letters from both Veolia Water RI (water service) and South Kingstown Department of Public Services (sewer service) for the project. The Will Serve letters are the appropriate level of approval for the conceptual Master Plan stage. The applicant will continue to work with both utility companies to provide the necessary calculations and details as the project evolves into the Preliminary Plan stage.

Please, feel free to contact me if you have any further questions regarding this matter.

Sincerely,
DiPrete Engineering Associates, Inc.



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