

ZBA FY2020-39, Valley CDC, Comprehensive Permit Application for 132 Northampton Road

ADDITIONAL PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Additional Comments received from June 25, 2020 at 4:48PM to July 2, 2020 at 12:00PM:

1. Amherst College Student, Comment Submitted via Town Website, Dated June 26, 2020;
2. Anonymous Amherst Resident, Comment Submitted via Town Website, Dated June 28, 2020;
3. Colin Weinstein, Comment Submitted via Town Website, Dated June 30, 2020;
4. Anonymous, Comment Submitted via Town Website, Dated June 30, 2020;
5. Anonymous, Comment Submitted via Town Website, Dated July 1, 2020;
6. Gerry Weiss, Comment Submitted via Town Website, Dated July 2, 2020;
7. Carol Lewis, Comments Submitted via Memo, Dated June 25, 2020;
8. Jim and Burd Schlessinger, Comments Submitted via Email, Dated July 28, 2020;
9. Erica Piedade, Comments Submitted via Memo, Dated June 29, 2020;
10. Nate Budington, Comments Submitted via Email, Dated July 28, 2020;

Print

**132 Northampton Road - Comments on 40B Comprehensive Permit Application - Submission
#15297**

Date Submitted: 6/26/2020

Comment Form

As an Amherst College student, I think that access to affordable housing is a necessity in Amherst. I've seen the horrible effects that lack of affordable housing can have in other college towns across the country, and Amherst needs to do everything in its power to support the ability of the local population to live well within the town.

Please type comments in the box above.

Attachments

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**132 Northampton Road - Comments on 40B Comprehensive Permit Application - Submission
#15299**

Date Submitted: 6/28/2020

Comment Form

Some of the comments from abutters are extremely offensive and reek of white privilege. One woman threatened to buy a gun and pretty much said if she shot a person living at the new development "it will be on your heads". Others tout the fact that their family "lived in Amherst College rental housing for 12 years." He noted "Amherst College rental housing is NOT college student housing, nor is it the general public renting these spaces." Well, gee, bully for you...good thing the "general public" was not allowed to rent there, eh? Someone who didn't have a family might be just as likely to stay 12 years like you did. Some very nice quiet people that I know live alone and have stayed in the same area for years, even if they didn't work for one of the private colleges.

These holier-than-thou statements about the "family-oriented neighborhood" and the development "should be in a more appropriate, less family, place" make me deeply uncomfortable. They act as if anyone who doesn't have a family and children is "transient" and therefore dangerous, which is a stereotype effectively debunked by Ginny _____ in her brilliant statement about "We can't choose our neighbors." She is right, to do so is Discriminatory and illegal when done by government, and just plain wrong when it is done by fellow citizens. One of the abutters (and notice all the long, often misleading comments are from abutters, who have an obvious vested interest in stopping the project, both personal and financial), warned ominously that there is the "potential for discrimination" under the Fair Housing Laws...is that really her concern, accessibility for the disabled? I think not. Another of the latest comments said What's the rush? "The Town already has 12% low income housing." Isn't that the problem we are all talking about, the ridiculously high rentals charged in Amherst? Time is of the essence to address homelessness as well as the needs of low and moderate income working people. At least if a person has a small room to call his or her own they can breathe and make a meal and have some peace of mind. In this day and age a room of one's own has to be the only place of refuge for many people.

The vehemence and lengthiness of the abutter comments remind me of the line "Methinks the lady doth protest too much" about Lady Macbeth. All the commenters are obviously very educated and very scientific (and lawyerly) with their charts and announcements of the number of children living on the various side roads nearby; more than one even brought up the issue of COVID-19 and used the scary term "superspreader", which of course refers to large gatherings at rallies or sporting events, for example, not individual people quietly minding their own business and just having a place to lay their head at night. I notice that the abutters did not have much to say about the Black Lives Matter protests, and the needs of historically underserved persons of color to housing, although they certainly brought up COVID-19 a lot. These scare tactics and stereotypes are very disheartening. Especially the stereotype that families are good and single, disabled or homeless people are troublemakers. Come on. Amherst is a great Town and it can do BETTER than that, for shame.

Anonymous resident of Amherst, MA (because these are powerful, wealthy homeowners and I don't need any drama)

Please type comments in the box above.

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**132 Northampton Road - Comments on 40B Comprehensive Permit Application - Submission
#15302**

Date Submitted: 6/30/2020

Comment Form

Please consider the support for the project articulated by Amherst College students

By Colin Weinstein

Letters opposing the town's proposal to allocate \$500,000 toward a single-room occupancy (SRO) development on Northampton Road prove that even residents of Amherst partake of a time-honored national tradition: good ol' American NIMBY-ism.

While some of the pushback against the now-passed proposal genuinely sought to improve the project based on legitimate arguments, many relied on overt profiling or profiling disguised by poorly interpreted data.

The letter sent to the Town Council by 56 residents from Amherst's District 3 and 4 particularly caught my attention. The authors emphasize they "are not saying 'not it our backyard,'" just "please get this right, because it's our backyard," yet they express quintessentially NIMBY worries about drug use and concern for "the public."

Profiling? Fear not, the authors assert that would be "a wholly inaccurate description of the situation," touting their academic credentials and "rigorous use of data" as unassailable proof that they lack bias.

But their data analysis is hardly rigorous. The authors refer to (but don't provide) "surveys and scientific research detailing the expected rates of history of substance use disorders, the rates of relapse, and the statistics regarding social/behavioral outcomes given substance abuse." Such statistics have no bearing on the sufficiency of Valley Community Development Corp's management or tenant services — they merely describe the general population suffering from addiction.

They next cite "police dispatch calls associated with ... residential buildings in Northampton, currently or formerly owned by Valley CDC" and calculate that 2,669 calls were placed "over a period of several years," 22% of which they categorize as "criminal."

There are a number of issues with this use of data, the most obvious of which is that calls to the police don't necessarily correlate to crimes. It's pretty simple: police calls are merely complaints until a case is proven. If anything, these data suggest that people call the cops more often on the poor and mentally ill. Despite the authors' claims of objectivity, the data themselves might be the result of rampant profiling among callers.

Even if these calls did report actual crimes, they do not prove the 132 Northampton Road project in Amherst will be problematic. A non-SRO development is included in the dataset, which is not a comparable model, and even more significantly, the developments in the dataset don't provide an on-site social worker, as the proposed project would for 20 hours per week.

The authors also present the data in a misleading way. They suggest the number of calls — 2,669 "over several years" and 2.07 to 3.06 "per resident per year" — is high, but they don't provide any comparisons. What's the average number of calls per resident per year in other neighborhoods with and without SRO developments? For all we know, the number of calls they cite is typical in every neighborhood.

Data issues aside, my biggest concern about the residents' letter is their mischaracterization of the project. While SROs can be transient housing for the homeless, 132 Northampton Road will provide permanent housing for 10 formerly homeless individuals. These individuals won't be strangers in the neighborhood; they'll be neighbors!

They, just as much as the writers of the letter, will have a stake in the community. Moreover, for all the authors' focus on mentally ill tenants, only two units are allocated for their use. The 16 remaining units are for tenants earning up to 50 percent and 80 percent of area median income who do not have rental vouchers. Thus, most of the units will be occupied by tenants who weren't homeless and don't have severe mental illness; they simply don't make as much as the neighborhood's abundant academics.

Valley CDC's plan may not be perfect, and it's worth engaging in useful critiques, but what frustrates me is the way the authors of this letter tout their academic credentials and "scientific analyses" as absolution from bias while providing a lopsided analysis of data. The use of these data to advocate for more tenant services isn't inherently problematic, but the authors tried to obstruct funding for the project without actually proving any flaws in it. Is this group genuinely seeking better housing options for vulnerable Amherst residents or just looking for justifications to move the development away from their homes?

In the end, my goal isn't to lambaste some academics for what looks like NIMBY-ism. I'd rather take their words at face value and assume they truly care about the success of this development and its tenants. If so, their goal shouldn't be to defund the project before it even starts; it should be to actively contribute to its success. Get to know the new tenants. If they're having issues, help them out (instead of calling the cops). Volunteer your time and your money.

In other words, be a neighbor to your neighbors. After all, it'll be their backyard too.

Colin Weinstein is a student at Amherst College

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Attachments

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132 Northampton Road - Comments on 40B Comprehensive Permit Application - Submission #15303

Date Submitted: 6/30/2020

Comment Form

The NIMBY opposition to the project by Amherst College professors and staff is shameful. More problematic, it initially took place last summer without input from the 1855-member strong Amherst College student body and now continues in their absence. This minority, in a town of 38,000 citizens many of whom are not present, is doing everything possible to deprive affordable housing to 23 low-income individuals.

For transparency, the identities of the Amherst College faculty and staff are below:

Kate Sims - Chair, Economics
Nick Nichols - Senior Coach, Physical Ed/Athletics
Laurie Katsaros - Chair of French
Dale Sinos - Visiting Professor of Classics
Eddy Augustin - Football Coach
Jeeyon Jeong - Assistant Professor of Biology
Joo Hyun Lee - Visiting Assistant Professor of Biology
Stephen George - Professor of Neuroscience
Rebecca Sinos - Classics
Rick Lopez - Dean of New Students/Professor of History/Chair of Latin X
Samuel C Morse - Chair of Art
Sean Redding - History, Black Studies
Amanda Rivera Lopez, Executive Director of Parent and Alumni Programs
William Loinaz - Professor of Physics

I witnessed these Amherst College professors in town council meetings last June and was mortified. The signatories to the letter utilized every alarmist tactic and sophisticated justification for opposing the project: narratives of criminality; mischaracterizations; stereotyping and stigmatization. They engaged in an all-out assault on the dignity of the unhoused in their unsuccessful attempts to deprive them of shelter. They slanted research, engaged in bias, misinterpreted data, and spoke on behalf of the College suggesting Jim Brassord opposed the project. This was false. Neither he, President Martin nor Board Chair Murphy opposed the project. Mr. Brassord is a community leader who raised \$100,000 rowing 1,600 miles to secure funds for the Musante Health Center which serves, and will continue to serve, this vulnerable population in our community.

These professors did not consider Amherst College student Esther Song's "The Only Solution to Homelessness" <https://amherststudent.com/article/the-only-solution-to-homelessness>. Neither did they read the September 13 2019 Amherst Bulletin guest column of Greene Ko '21 "Why I no longer fear working with the homeless," where he shares his direct experience working with the unhoused in Amherst. But the students articulated their disappointment in these professors and overwhelmingly supported the project <https://amherststudent.com/article/dear-amherst-faculty-an-open-letter-about-the-lett>

The College's Center for Community Engagement has involved students with local non-profits serving this population; the Athletic Liaisons work with organizations and their teams help the unhoused and food insecure. Amherst Athletics' LEADS program engages directly with this population through its leadership programs for student athletes. Eddy Augustin and Nick Nichols' opposition to the project sets a terrible example for students, and it contradicts the spirit of LEADS.

132 Northampton Road was offered first to Amherst College before being placed on the open market and the College declined to purchase it. The professors claimed the development would eliminate public use of Pratt Field because tenants would cause harm to users of Pratt Field, or act in inappropriate ways on the Field, or cause a nuisance on the Field. This fear-based rhetoric continued unabated by these signatories with premonitions such as "the SRO population is sure to run afoul of many constituencies," and warning of impending doom to women and children such as its "not unusual to see a female student running laps alone on the track." Professor Sinos cited the "presence of needles" currently found on the grounds. Pratt has been closed to the public in the past in response to past circumstances. There were further alarmist pleas from the signatories to protect "vulnerable" children from the private Woodside Children's Center, a childcare center incidentally with a preference for Amherst College employees.

Beneath all of this was self-centered concern about a loss of "open space" which is actually privately held; Pratt does not belong to these professors and it is not their private country club. Pratt belongs to Amherst students, who overwhelmingly support the project and whose tuition and fees pay the salaries of professors so they can reside in College-owned rentals and homes adjacent to the College. The hypocrisy is so surprising as these faculty and staff benefit from generous housing subsidies with many thousands of dollars both for purchases and rentals adjacent to the college https://www.amherst.edu/academiclife/provost_dean_faculty/fph/fachandbook/salaries/ftfringebenefits/housing The town has many parks available for those unwilling or unable to reside in close proximity to those who may be selected for 132 Northampton Road <https://www.amherstma.gov/1755/Parks>

The signatories engaged in profiling and mischaracterized a group of as-yet-unselected potential tenants as substance abusers or mentally ill; this is no different than prematurely characterizing a low-income applicant to the College. Like the College, the Valley CDC is selective and tenants are screened thoroughly. By ascribing characteristics to individuals because

they belong to a group, such as low income, homeless, and having a mental health disability, they engaged in profiling. Professors also engaged in selection bias by focusing research on police and emergency service calls made in other towns by Valley CDC property residents in their attempts to curtail the project rather than studying how housing contributes to markedly more positive outcomes for newly housed individuals. Research by the signatories ignored how the lives of victims of domestic violence seeking safety and shelter are improved. There was no research or statistics on the intersection of housing and sobriety, nor were any inquiries made into how housing can facilitate re-entry into education and employment. The greatest oversight was ignoring how profoundly transformative positive relations between the Amherst College community and these 23 individual tenants might be. That would require focusing research on human capital, rather than police and emergency service calls.

Valley CDC notes opportunities for Amherst College students to volunteer, tutor, perhaps even host a housewarming, something students are enthusiastic about. Supporters of the project included leaders of civic and social organizations such as: Amherst Forward; Amherst Survival Center; League of Women Voters; Interfaith Housing Corporation Board of Amherst; Amherst Housing Authority; and the Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness. Many town residents support the development. Hundreds of people attended Town Council meetings expressing support. Written support came from the owners of the Freckled Fox, a neighbor of a similar Valley CDC project in Florence and it was positive. It came from Lily Gaev whose property is adjacent to a Valley CDC SRO project in Northampton, again all positive, "We've split up lawn and hedge maintenance; we get to admire their attractive landscaping, including flowers, shrubs, and garden path lighting." Gaev noted how the building has a value-enhancing compliment to her block. This is a positive opportunity for abutters, Amherst College and the Town

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Attachments

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132 Northampton Road - Comments on 40B Comprehensive Permit Application - Submission #15306

Date Submitted: 7/1/2020

Comment Form

This building is located INSIDE of an athletic facility that also functions as a de-facto public park, particularly for families with small children. Allowing up to 28 people to smoke (including marijuana) in this location is entirely disrespectful to the current use. It will have a real, negative impact-but it doesn't have to.

ZBA, please make this a non-smoking building for the sake of the young athletes and the kids. The same number of deserving people will still be helped by the development, but in a way that is also respectful to the neighborhood and the students who have to practice here.

Are you really going to fight for the rights of a developer who doesn't want to have to enforce a sensible rule instead of fighting for the health of the building tenants, kids and young adults? Think about it.

Please type comments in the box above.

Attachments

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132 Northampton Road - Comments on 40B Comprehensive Permit Application - Submission #15308

Date Submitted: 7/2/2020

Comment Form

I am writing in support of the 132 Northampton Road housing project. I will speak here as the Chair of the Board of Craig's Doors, an organization that runs the winter Homeless Shelter in the First Baptist Church. Research shows that the primary cause of homelessness is lack of affordable housing. Amherst has a long standing and strong committment to providing affordable housing and this project comes as close to a perfect example of such housing as I can imagine. And this project is almost unique in actually targeting homeless persons for some of the apartments. At a public hearing last year, I heard some people speak against the project saying that it wasn't a good plan for homeless people because it would be a long wait until they could get in, because it wasn't close to a bus stop and because it was a half mile from the nearest supermarket. I would first say that I doubt any of those persons have actually spoken to any homeless people about their lives. If they had, they would know those reasons given for objecting to the project are extremely poorly informed about the needs and how living at 132 Northampton Road would be a blessing, rather than unfair! That this project will also have such a range of income eligibility is also part of it's near perfection, along with the excellent track record Valley CDC has in running such housing. Please do whatever it takes to permit this much needed and well thought out affordable housing project. Thank you,
Gerry Weiss,
District 5
Chair, Board of Directors, Craig's Doors
Former Chair, Amherst Select Board

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June 25, 2020

To: Amherst Zoning Board of Appeals

Re: Amherst Studio Apartments Comprehensive Permit Application

Dear Board Members,

I want to voice my strong support for this application and urge the Board to approve it as submitted. Some of the reasons for my support and request:

- This project addresses needs the town identified in the Housing Production Plan approved more than 5 years ago. That need has only increased since then. This project will provide some housing for homeless, low and extremely low income people, as that plan called for. There is no other housing quite like it in town now.
- Valley Community Development (Valley CDC) has been working on addressing this need for several years. They have a strong track record, dedicated staff and have, in this instance, shown their responsiveness to concerns raised in many ways, including by increasing parking and by planning for on site staffing that will increase residents ease in locating services, should they choose to use them.
- The proposed location and site plan are appropriate, being near shopping, public transportation and the town center. The area is already home to single and multi-family dwellings. The design of the property provides for open spaces around the building and a building facade that is consistent with other Amherst properties.
- Valley CDC, is planning on a building that is passive energy certified, thus helping Amherst decrease our energy footprint while providing environmental advantages to the project's residents.
- Delays or changes to this proposal will not only slow the availability of the housing but more than likely increase the project's costs. For a project already with a slim margin for financial viability, such increases could be seriously detrimental.

Again, I strongly urge your prompt approval of Amherst Studio Apartments Comprehensive Permit Application.

Sincerely

Carol Lewis
21 Ward St
Amherst

From: [Family](#)
To: [Pollock, Maureen](#); [Schoen, Cathy](#); [Swartz, Sarah E.](#); griesmerl@amherstma.gov; [De Angelis, Patricia C.](#); [Pam, Dorothy S.](#); [Ryan, George E.](#); [Ross, Evan R.](#); [Schreiber, Stephen D.](#); [Bahl-Milne, Shalini](#); [Dumont, Darcy A.](#); [Brewer, Alisa](#); [Hanneke, Mandi Jo](#); [Steinberg, Andrew](#)
Subject: Fwd: Timely letter and article re 132 Northampton Rd
Date: Sunday, June 28, 2020 1:07:49 PM

To the Town Council and the Zoning Board of Appeals, Amherst, MA:

Just in time for inclusion in current deliberations by both the ZBA and the Town Council on the project at 132 Northampton Road, the New York Times today printed a front page article that speaks to Covid-19 as it affects the Town of Amherst, specifically. These issues are likely to affect us all for years to come.

PLEASE READ THIS ARTICLE! (Attached.)

Without a miracle, University towns like Amherst will be extremely hard-hit by the economic effects of Covid-19. Especially now, Amherst can ill afford to squander its fiscal resources. The New York Times reported that, because Amherst's public water infrastructure is overbuilt for the much smaller population who will soon have to support it, our expenses must go up substantially. Serious changes are also coming in employment availability (down), and housing and apartment availability (up), etc. As amenities disappear, property values will drop along with tax revenue. Will we have to downsize our police force?

The only reason to proceed with 132 Northampton Road as before is if we fail to take into account the changes that are already upon us with Covid-19's effect on Town and schools. Along with population losses, Amherst may face commensurate jobs losses, too.

For the foreseeable future, it makes no sense to move forward with what is an exorbitant proposal at \$5M. According to this article and others, it is clear that we should wait and see what happens before throwing good money after bad. Soon enough there likely will be an abundance of cheap apartments to renovate (at MUCH lower cost) for low-income and homeless individuals. If so, there will be no need for this 28 unit SRO.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/28/us/coronavirus-college-towns.html?action=click&module=Spotlight&pgtype=Homepage>

Sincerely,
Jim and Burd Schlessinger

Erica Piedade
488 Montague Rd.
Amherst, MA 01002
June 29, 2020

Amherst Zoning Boards of Appeals
Town of Amherst
Amherst, MA 01002

Dear Amherst Zoning Boards of Appeals:

I am writing as a resident of Amherst who has lived in this community for 26 years and writing in support of the Amherst Studio Apartment Comprehensive Application. First, I want to state why this is so important to me and I believe for the community of Amherst to support. My family made a conscious decision to buy a home in Amherst, because of what Amherst espouses as values of a caring community (locally and globally) and an inclusive community. Amherst is a special place. It is inter-generational. It is filled with learning, creativity, leadership, innovation, art, and culture. It is filled with many people who know that making the world a more equitable, peaceful, and compassionate place starts where you live. Many of us also know that housing instability, lack of affordable housing and homelessness not only is a major social determinant of health for individuals and families, it is also a determinant of the health of a community. What I mean by that is that when a community ensures that all its residents have opportunities to thrive and attain health and well-being that improves the health and well-being of the total community.

I have attended meetings on 132 Northampton Rd. and have seen the plans. The developers, Valley Community Development, of the site have extensive experience in working with communities, neighborhood stakeholders, town leaders and advocates and the people who will directly benefit from this initiative. I am impressed how they changed the design and supports to address concerns of neighbors and others. They are attentive to input, because they want to make sure the initiative is successful for the individuals who will be living in the apartment complex and for the neighbors living nearby.

Amherst is in dire need of affordable housing. Many individuals and families who work in Amherst cannot afford to rent or buy in Amherst – teachers, emergency responders, service workers, young professionals and many more are priced out of the community they serve. For many, coming up with the first month's and last month's rent and a deposit is challenging, and even more so for people who are trying to get back on their feet. This apartment complex is one step in providing affordable housing for members of the Amherst community and for increasing

the health and well-being of members of our community. They are us, they contribute to our community, they are part of our community.

The complex is well designed and thought out. The location is appropriate. It is financially sound. I, as an Amherst resident, as a public health professional, and as a member of the Amherst Municipal Affordable Housing Trust ask for your support for this initiative by supporting their application for a comprehensive permit.

Thank you,
Erica M. Piedade

From: [Nate Budington](#)
To: [Pollock, Maureen](#)
Subject: ZBA Northampton Rd Project
Date: Thursday, July 2, 2020 11:53:32 AM

Ms Pollock--I strongly urge the ZBA to approve the Valley Community Development Corp. project for single room occupancy project planned for Northampton Rd.

Simple, affordable housing for the demographics served by this project is scarce across the United States. This is especially true for the disabled, for whom appropriate housing is especially hard to find.

This project is being developed by an organization with a long and distinguished history of successful low-income housing developments and it would have an immediate and lasting impact on housing in Amherst.

The Amherst CPA voted for this project unanimously and with enthusiasm.

Nate Budington
Amherst
former Chair, Amherst Community Preservation Committee