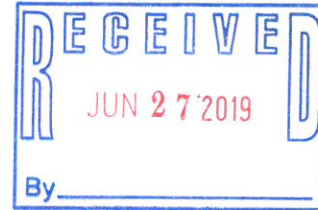


BILL DeLUCA, Chair
JAMES CANNING, Vice-Chair
WILLIAM BACIS
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STEPH CLYMER

ANNE CAPRA, Conservation Administrator/Planner

June 26, 2019

Mark Cavannaugh, Chair
Planning Board
Town of South Hadley
116 Main Street
South Hadley, MA 01075



Reference: Skinner Woods Flexible Development, Preliminary Plan

Dear Mr. Cavannaugh:

The South Hadley Conservation Commission has reviewed the Skinner Woods Flexible Development Preliminary Plan, dated 5/17/19 and offers the following comments for your consideration.

1. The proposed 10-unit condominium development project is within the Water Supply Protection District (WSPD) for the Fire District #2 water supply. The current plans identify ten individual septic systems on site which will need to meet Title V requirements. Additionally, the portion of the property planned for development is currently a white pine dominated forest, of which 3.5 acres will be cut for the development. What mitigation is planned to ensure compliance with WSPD bylaws?
2. On page 15 under Cultural and Historic Features, it is noted that there are fourteen trees over 18" DBH, of which eleven are west of the gravel road and will be preserved. Is any mitigation proposed for removal of three trees over 18" DBH?
3. Careful planning for the clearing of the proposed 3.5 acres needs to be undertaken to ensure that the trees along the edge of the cut are not damaged (roots, trunks, canopy) and become hazard trees in successive years. It is recommended that prior to any land clearing activities, the zone for land clearing be clearly delineated and reviewed with an arborist and the construction contractor prior to commencement of site work to ensure that the surrounding trees are given the best opportunity for survival in the years to come.
4. Regarding the proposed preserved open space (8.73 acres) at north end of property - What mechanism will be used to conserve this open space? The NHESP MESA letter dated April 26, 2018 says the applicant stated that +/- 8 acres of open space will be conveyed in fee to the South Hadley Conservation Commission under Article 97. The Commission was never presented with this proposal, nor has agreed to accept this. The mechanism under which this open space will be conserved needs to be clarified, and agreed upon by NHESP.
5. Although the narrative states that the "public" will have access to a new trail on the newly conserved open space, allowing them to access Lithia Springs and Elmer Brook, the plans do not provide any parking for "the public" at the trailhead. On page 18, the narrative states "public easement shall permit non-

residents to traverse this open space". Public access to the Holyoke Range from South Hadley is limited. Designated parking for trail users would seem necessary in order for members of the public, beyond the owners of the proposed condominiums, to actually use this trailhead. Without designated parking, nuisance use of this trailhead and roadside parking is likely to become an issue.

6. Restoration of the gravel pit – Of the existing site, the area proposed to be conserved as open space is the most disturbed but does offer the best opportunity for restoration given that it is an abandoned gravel pit. Although the site is close to the Holyoke Range and offers scenic vistas in that direction, the ecological integrity of the site is compromised due to the earth removal activities that have occurred there. If the applicant is serious about designating the 8.73 acres for conservation, it is essential to provide a detailed proposal for the ecological restoration of this area. In most disturbed sites, if left fallow, non-native invasive species will begin to colonize the site and eventually dominate, allowing access of non-native species into the more intact ecosystem of the Holyoke Range. Although these plants will eventually vegetate the site, they offer little in support of the surrounding ecosystem. For disturbed sites proposed for conservation, a detailed ecological restoration plan is strongly recommended. If the intent is for the long term preservation of vistas of the Range, this land can be managed as either a native grassland or shrubland. However either of the two will require a maintained plan to prevent the area from eventually reverting to forest or non-native community.
7. Proposed Public Access Trail – How will this trail be constructed and maintained, and by whom? Trail construction is usually a very popular endeavor, but long-term trail maintenance often is lacking. For such facilities to be part of a permitted project, a detailed plan for the construction and maintenance of this trail is recommended.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,



James Canning, Vice Chair

cc: Conservation Commission
Board of Health
Water District 2
Selectboard