MEMO TO THE ZBA

Historical Commission Comments to the ZBA
751 – 761 Boston Post Road Comprehensive Permit Application

Introduction:
On November 4, 2019, three members of the Mill Creek Residential team updated the Historical Commission regarding the historic structures that are part of Woodleigh Farm.

The Commission appreciates the direction the applicant is taking toward the preservation of significant structures on the site.

Historic Structures Overview:
Mark Sibley/Mary Rice House (761 Boston Post Road)
This building will be preserved in-situ, with the exterior of the building, according to Mill Creek, “preserved to the fullest extent reasonably practicable. Inside, the front staircase and fireplace may be retained, while the remainder of the interior will be remodeled.” See below for the Commission’s request to define what should be preserved. The first floor of the building will be utilized as a leasing and reception area, with offices for leasing staff. The second floor of the building will be utilized for additional office space as well as storage and conference areas.

Mirick/Farnsworth House (751 Boston Post Road)
This structure, which has been moved at least twice in its history, will be relocated near the Mark Sibley/Mary Rice House to stand elevated along Boston Post Road. According to the applicant, “the exterior of the building will be preserved to the fullest extent reasonably practicable. Inside, the staircases and fireplaces may be retained wherever reasonably practicable, while the remainder of the interior will be remodeled.” See below for the Commission’s request to define what should be preserved. The building will be used for community common space and work-from-home spaces.

Eleanor Raymond West Wing (751 Boston Post Road)
Along with the Mirick/Farnsworth House, this building will be relocated to Boston Post Road, attached to the Mirick/Farnsworth house via a new connector building (details below).
Mill Creek has stated that “the interior and exterior of the building will be preserved to the fullest extent reasonably practicable, with particular attention paid to the grand spiral staircase and the fireplaces.” See below for the Commission’s request to define what should be preserved. The building will be used as a guest suite for community residents who wish to accommodate additional visitors. A new bathroom will be installed within an existing closet space to avoid destroying interior walls.

**East Wing (751 Boston Post Road)**
This structure will be demolished and removed.

**New Connector Building (751 Boston Post Road)**
A new structure will be built to connect the Mirick/Farnsworth house with the Eleanor Raymond West Wing that will replicate the outside appearance of the existing connection. This new structure will include a new kitchen and bathroom, utilities, and work-from-home space. The footprint of the new building will match the existing structure, and the roof profile will match as well.

**Mark Sibley Barn**
Mill Creek Residential has noted that this two-story bank barn structure “will be reasonably disassembled and delivered (unassembled) to Land’s Sake Farm” as a donation. See below for the Commission’s recommendations regarding the Barn.

**Historical Commission Recommendations:**
While the Commission understands and appreciates that the developer intends to protect certain elements of these structures, we would like the opportunity to develop our own list of significant exterior and interior features for each building. Our list can be ready at the beginning of 2020. We hope to work with the applicants to ensure preservation of the important fabric.

The historic buildings will be sited together in a group along Boston Post Road. (See the attached below.) The proposal includes adding fill to the area just west of the existing Mark Sibley/Mary Rice house location. This will elevate the relocated Mirick/Farnsworth House, making it as visible as the Sibley House. The intent is to screen the new construction from the street, while emphasizing visibility of this group of historic structures. Such a change could enhance the Boston Post Road National Register District, if details are thoughtfully considered. The Commission requests elevation studies of views from the Post Road, as well as several sections from BPR through to the rear of the site.

The Commission is mindful of the importance of appropriate landscape, and we encourage the applicants to make sensitive site decisions around the historic structures. Additionally, the existing stone walls both along the Post Road and the lane leading to the barn are character defining parts of that area. Relocating curb cuts and driveways will require removing and infilling portions of the walls. Raising the site to accommodate relocation of 751 Boston Post Road will likely disturb the walls on the lane leading to the barn. We would like to see these reset at the new elevation. The existing view of the lane is part of a rural landscape that is
vanishing in Weston. We would like the opportunity to confer with the applicants on landscaping and site issues as the proposal progresses.

While the Commission would prefer that the Sibley Barn be re-used on the site, we appreciate that the developer is willing donate it to Land’s Sake Farm. The Commission requests that the developer carefully label all disassembled members of the barn and then reassemble them at Land’s Sake Farm property, in coordination with the Farm’s master planning. This would involve making the building weatherproof.

The Commission would like to see the results of an archaeological study of the area prior to any development activity. A site analysis apparently has been conducted and a draft report will be filed with the Massachusetts Historical Commission. The Commission should be kept apprised of the results.

The applicants have documented the existing conditions of the historic structures on the site. These existing conditions drawings should be made available to the Commission and the Town.

The Commission realizes that the Woodleigh Farm site will lose its current pastoral character as a result of this development. Before that happens, the proponents should provide professional documentation of the existing context in the form of photographs and a video which can also be used as the foundation for a Cultural Landscape Report and as part of the permanent record of the site. The proponents should consider using this documentation for educational purposes to inform prospective tenants about the history of the site.

Finally, the Commission asks that the proponents provide permanent protection for the preserved historic buildings, notably as preservation deed restrictions to be held by the Town. The Commission will confirm Mass Historical Commission’s role in this process. The applicants foresee that the historic buildings, in their new context, will contribute to the Boston Post Road National Register District. They understand the advantage of creating a unique streetscape of 600 feet that will benefit both the town and the development with permanent protections.

We look forward to working cooperatively with the project applicants on a successful outcome.

Note that two attachments provided by Mill Creek Residential follow this memo. Attachment A contains layouts of two of the significant historic buildings. Attachment B shows the layout of the historic buildings along Boston Post Road. Thank you for considering our comments.

Phyllis Halpern and Steven Wagner
Co-chairs, Weston Historical Commission
ATTACHMENT A
BUILDING LAYOUTS
ATTACHMENT B
SITE PLAN