THE COALITION FOR
BUZZARDS BAY

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By Electronic Mail

Secretary Ian A. Bowles
EOEA, Attn: MEPA Office
Briony Angus, EOEA No. 13975
100 Cambridge Street, Suite 900
Boston MA 02114

RE: Cotuit Woods, Rochester, Massachusetts: EOEA No. 13975

Dear Secretary Bowles,

The Coalition for Buzzards Bay ("Coalition") has reviewed the Expanded Environmental Notification Form ("ENF") for the Cotuit Woods cluster subdivision, ("Project") proposed by Edgewood Development Company, LLC ("Proponent"), and offers the following comments. The Coalition is a nonprofit membership organization dedicated to the restoration, protection and sustainable use and enjoyment of Buzzards Bay and its watershed. We represent more than 4,700 individuals, families, organizations, and businesses in Southeastern Massachusetts.

Project Summary

This project seeks to build a 115-lot single family residential cluster subdivision on 566 acres located off of High Street and Ryder Road in Rochester, Massachusetts. Site characteristics include approximately 119 acres of wetland, the Sippican River to the west, wooded upland, and approximately 460 acres of Eastern Box Turtle habitat. The proponent claims to retain 70% of the site as open space while maintaining a minimum lost size of 40,000 square feet. The proponent also seeks to incorporate some aspects of a "low impact development". No public water or sewers serve the site, requiring on site Title 5 septic systems together with private wells.

The proponent requests a Single EIR ("SEIR") for this proposal suggesting that this EENF has addressed all potential environmental impacts, project alternatives, and mitigation measures. The Coalition suggests due to the size of the development and potential impacts it may have on the environment that further alternatives be explored and recommends a Draft Environmental Impact Report. We offer the following inquiries.

Nitrogen Pollution in Buzzards Bay

Nitrogen pollution is the greatest long-term threat to the health of Buzzards Bay and its more than 30 harbors and coves. It adversely affects water quality and degrades habitat by

impacting marine organisms such as fish and shellfish. Nitrogen pollution stimulates algae growth resulting in eutrophication, a process by which the oxygen is eliminated from the water. Eutrophication causes poor water clarity, bad odors, stressed marine organisms and even fish kills.

Buzzards Bay is currently losing the battle against nitrogen pollution with over half of the embayments throughout Buzzards Bay categorized as impaired including the Weweantic River. Further importation of untreated wastewater through on site septic systems into the Weweantic River estuary further contributes to the overall degradation. The water quality of the Weweantic River, the largest sub-watershed in the Buzzards Bay basin, suffers from nutrient overenrichment from non-point sources including residential wastewater disposal. The Coalition's water quality monitoring data indicates that the upper Weweantic River estuary is among the most eutrophic (nutrient-degraded) of all Buzzards Bay embayments. In fact, the water quality within the River has degraded to such critical levels as to warrant being listed on the State's Integrated List of Waters as an impaired waterbody for nutrients requiring a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) threshold. Documented eelgrass loss, areas of large algae growth, and moderate oxygen depletion represent the physical impacts nutrient pollution is having on the Weweantic River.

This project sits squarely in the Weweantic watershed, and the additional 115 on site septic systems will likely contribute to the further impairment the Weweantic River. This is an unacceptable outcome.

Wastewater Alternatives

The Coalition requests that the Secretary require the proponent to further investigate wastewater alternatives. The Coalition encourages the proponent to further explore decentralized wastewater treatment plants and community septic systems both with advanced nitrogen removal technology as alternatives to onsite Title V septic systems. Both technologies are capable of achieving high quality treatment thereby reducing the amount of nitrogen impacting the Weweantic River.

Commitment to Open Space and the Protection of Wetlands

The proponent states that more than 70%, or over 400 acres, will be maintained as open space. The proponent includes in that percentage wetland areas, operating cranberry bogs and the buffers between housing clusters. The Coalition suggests that the inclusion of these non buildable areas inflates the actual amount of open space upland preserved and should be adjusted. We respectfully request that the Secretary require the proponent to more accurately compute the total amount of open space upland being preserved. Furthermore, the proponent should commit to placing a conservation restriction on the remaining open space and agriculture preservation restrictions on the continued operation of cranberry bogs.

While the Coalition supports the cluster design versus the conventional subdivision layout, we ask that the proponent consider further alternative layouts. The current proposal presents the meandering road connecting the east and west sections of the development

spanning the entire site requiring approximately 3,000 square feet of wetland alteration. A large section of this road, impacting the wetlands, does not serve as access to additional homes. Besides the conventional subdivision layout, we encourage the review of alternative layouts which avoid wetlands crossings.

Stormwater and Low Impact Development

The EENF states that a portion of the project roadways will incorporate LID elements consisting of roadside grassed swales and shallow settling areas prior to discharge into detention basins toward wetland areas. The Coalition encourages an expansion of these techniques to the round abouts and cul-de-sac islands. Currently, the proposal is for mounded and planted cul-de-sacs. Instead of mounding the cul-de-sacs and creating more runoff, the Coalition suggests that these areas are prime opportunities for treating stormwater through rain gardens.

Conclusion

In conclusion, The Coalition respectfully requests the Secretary to require the proponent to consider wastewater alternatives which provide advanced treatment for nitrogen in order to protect our downstream resources. In addition, The Coalition encourages the proponent to calculate a more accurate open space figure.

The Coalition appreciates the opportunity to comment on the proposed project and is available to the MEPA staff, the proponent, and other agencies to answer any questions spurred by these comments.

Sincerely,

Korrin N. Petersen, Esq.
Advocacy Director

Cc: Representative William M. Straus
Senator Joan M. Menard
Rochester Board of Selectmen
Rochester Conservation Commission
Rochester Planning Board