

May 17, 2021

Mr. Christian Klein
Chair, Zoning Board of Appeals
51 Grove Street
Arlington, MA 02476

To Mr. Klein and the Members of the ZBA:

As an abutter to the proposed 1165R development, I would like to provide comment to and request of the Zoning Board of Appeals as the review period continues to deliberate on the traffic and safety concerns of the proposal to date.

First, as an abutter and community member who has tried to keep up with the Board's review process, I am pleased that the applicant has demonstrated how it can and will be responsive to the critiques, suggestions, and mandates of the various town bodies and community members. For example, members from the Ryder/Beck neighborhood were able to meet with the applicant in April and the applicant has since initiated some revisions that **start to** address concerns common to the neighborhood. I hope we can continue working with such good will and momentum on issues of pedestrian and cyclist safety.

By now, the Zoning Board members have repeatedly heard the concerns for traffic, parking, and road use safety from the community members of the Ryder/Beck neighborhood and beyond. As a quick overview here:

- Ryder Street is a small but very busy, mixed use private road consisting of (a) residential, contractor/heavy commercial, and now Town DPW vehicular traffic, and heavy (b) cyclist and (c) pedestrian traffic accessing the Minuteman Bikeway or making the Summer Street to Massachusetts Avenue connection. Ryder Street also represents a long stretch of the Ottoson Middle School walkers' corridor and is used by multiple early childhood care facilities to access the Hill's Hill playground and field.
- At its recent historic and current baseline, **Ryder Street at its best is an unsafe roadway** where on a near-weekly basis the negligence, speed, and confusion of motor vehicle drivers of all kinds make for numerous "close calls" with other motor vehicles, cyclists, and pedestrian users, the latter two being extremely vulnerable users of the roadway.
- The applicant's proposal seeks to add 124 apartments (original submission $n = 130$) which will increase the vehicular, cyclist, and pedestrian users of this unsafe roadway.

To my view, there remains numerous concerns for the safety of *all users* of Ryder Street, but especially our community's most vulnerable users: **cyclists and pedestrian roadway users**. Through the Zoning Board public meetings, we have heard extensive detail about traffic counts and congestion mitigation efforts from the applicant, however we have heard very little about how the applicant proposes to provide safety for cyclists and pedestrians in their reconfiguration and expanded access of the 1165R site. Respectfully I ask the Zoning Board

members to consider two ‘novel’ groups of community members who have not yet been spoken about or represented in the applicant’s documents:

To date, it is not clear how seriously the applicant has regarded the safety and wayfinding needs of the ***tenants and tenant guests who will be adding to the cycling and pedestrian users*** of Ryder Street. I think many agree that adding alternative modes of transportation for 120+ new units is a positive idea moving forward and that getting community members using our town’s outdoor recreational facilities is a fantastic idea; however, in the Ryder Street context that is not yet a safe proposition. To start thinking about this first group of users, I hope a basic understanding of the following items will help initiate how the Zoning Board can assess the applicant’s concern for their tenants:

- What is the projected absolute/added number of cycling and pedestrian users?
- What are the specific travel/access patterns that the applicant has considered to come to their proposed plans?
- Who has the applicant consulted for advising on local bicycle and pedestrian safety concerns?
- What are the best practices and models for integrating into a busy, mixed use intersection that the applicant drew from?
- What are the safety and wayfinding measures that the applicant has proposed or should commit to providing?

Next, to date, it is not clear how seriously the applicant has regarded the safety and wayfinding needs of the ***pedestrian and cyclists of the larger Arlington community who will now be stopping to experience the proposed renovated, expanded access to the Mill Stream corridor.*** To my view, again, this would appear to be a positive added feature of the proposal for the community; however, in the context of an unsafe street, I urge extraordinary consideration and attention to safety but the plans show little planning for how visitors will interact with the site and roadway. Again:

- What is the projected number of cycling and pedestrian users who will visit the renovated, expanded Mill Stream corridor?
- What are the specific travel/access patterns that the applicant has considered to come to their proposed plans?
- Who has the applicant consulted for advising on local bicycle and pedestrian safety concerns? Are there standards for projects along the Mill Stream?
- What are the best practices and models for integrating into a busy, mixed use intersection that the applicant drew from?
- What are the safety and wayfinding measures that the applicant has proposed or should commit to providing?

As an abutter whose home office window looks directly at the Mill Brook/Ryder intersection, I have seen too many close calls with drivers, dog walkers, cyclists, cars, property, and—the most scary—our Ottoson Middle Schoolers. And as a mother of a very young child who has no choice but to be vigilant about personal safety on Ryder Street, I mourned the unnecessary,

preventable loss of Charles Proctor's life when he was struck a block away on Appleton while simultaneously feared even more that *that* was going to happen on our little street here on Ryder. How many more close call alerts will the Town need before it pays attention to the Ryder Street entry to the Minuteman Bikeway? In the promise of the many measures that Arlington is now taking regarding the safety of our many unsafe intersections, I hope the Zoning Board will take seriously its opportunity and responsibility to hold applicants accountable in their regard for our community's most vulnerable roadway users. Here, with the applicants of the 1165R proposed site, I do see their responsiveness to other bodies' concerns as a good foundation for their obvious need for revision, but I do not yet see plans that indicate the applicant has done the deep dives into the best solutions for their future tenants, their tenants' guests, and the Arlington community members who they seek to attract to the Mill Stream corridor. I urge the Zoning Board to hold the applicant accountable for providing sufficient (if not premiere) safety measures regarding this local concern. I am more than willing to meet with individual Board members and/or the applicant to walk through the neighborhood or along the Mill Stream/Ryder intersection to make this proposal one that forefronts cyclist and pedestrian safety.

I appreciate your time and responsiveness.

Best,
Mariah Contreras
Ryder Street