

ROCKY HILL MBTA COMMUNITY ELM STREET

INTRODUCTION

Dale Development, LLC (the “Applicant”) proposes to construct a residential development to be known as “Rocky Hill” on an approximately 65-acre site located generally on the east side of Elm Street and comprised of six individual tax parcels (collectively, the “Property”). Rocky Hill is designed to meet the criteria and spirit of the Rocky Hill Multi-family Overlay District (“RH-MFOD”), Section XI.V of the Amesbury Zoning Code, and the accompanying Design Guidelines set forth in the “Residential Pattern Book, The Rocky Hill, Amesbury”.

Project Overview

As anticipated by the RH-MFOD, Rocky Hill is designed with two distinct neighborhoods. The South Neighborhood is proposed to be a total of 85 homes in a mix of single-family, duplex, triplex and quad-plex buildings and will be marketed for-sale to individual homeowners. The North Neighborhood is proposed as 296 rental homes in 29 individual buildings. Each neighborhood includes community buildings, formal greens, pocket parks and related amenities. Ten percent (10%) of residences within Rocky Hill shall be designated as “Affordable Housing” in compliance with Section XL.Q.2 of the Zoning Code. The applicant shall submit an Affirmative Fair Housing Marketing Plan meeting all EOHLC requirements as a condition of site plan approval.

A series of connected trails within conservation areas of the Property perimeter will serve the residents and the general public; a parking area is designated for public access to the trails immediately off a roundabout which separates the two Neighborhoods. These trails, together with extensive sidewalks and paths both within the proposed development and to and along Elm Street, will provide pedestrian and bicycle connections to surrounding retail and commercial uses as well as the Amesbury River Trail to the north-northwest and to the Ghost Trail to the south-southeast.

Access to and from Rocky Hill will be via a single boulevard entrance off Elm Street immediately across from the entrance driveway of the Hampton Inn on the west side of Elm Street. A second emergency access drive to Elm Street will be provided through the Amesbury Animal Hospital site via an existing easement. The applicant will request that upon completion the boulevard road be dedicated as a public road from Elm Street to the roundabout separating the South and North Neighborhoods. All other roadways, drives, common areas and conservation lands shall remain in private ownership of either a homeownership association (in the case of the South Neighborhood) or the private land owner (in the case of the North Neighborhood).

Status of Planning Matters to Date

The Applicant has made significant progress on State and Local planning and permitting in furtherance of the subject application. Among these are the following:

- **RH-MFOD**. The adoption of the RH-MFOD in October 2024 followed nearly three years of discussions among the developer, the City and various stakeholders in the City and region. Discussions surrounding development of this Property were included in various City initiatives

including the Merrimack River District study of 2021-2022, the Amesbury Housing Summit of 2023 and, finally, the creation of the MBTA Communities Overlay District. During this same time period, the Applicant and City planning staff worked extensively on concept plans and the Residential Pattern Book which is incorporated in the RH-MFOD. This proposal is the culmination of those efforts.

- ORAD. The Amesbury Conservation Commission issued two Wetlands Orders of Resource Area Determination on August 7, 2023, and on March 18, 2024. The Orders are valid for a period of three years. The proposed site plan is designed to meet the regulations of the Commission without waiver or exception. Applicant shall soon file a Notice of Intent and pursue an Order of Conditions from the Commission for the proposed development plan.
- MEPA. An Environmental Notification Form (“ENF”) was filed with the MEPA Office of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs on May 31, 2024. Comments were received and a Certificate issued in July 2024. On May 22, 2025, the Applicant hosted an Environmental Justice Outreach meeting via zoom following an extensive advertising and public notice process. A Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) will be filed with the MEPA Office on or before August 15, 2025.
- MassDOT and Mass Grant Application. As identified in the MEPA Certificate and described further in the Traffic Impact Assessment, the proposed development will impact service along the Route 110 Corridor in the vicinity of the intersection with Elm Street and the on/off ramps of I-95. The MEPA FEIR will include a Letter of Commitment describing the mitigation measures offered by Applicant. As these and other related improvements are desired by Applicant and the City, the two have cooperated on a Community One-Stop Application requesting \$5 million in MassWorks grant funding, with grant round recipients to be announced in Fall 2025. An application for the proposed improvements to the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) is prepared and expected to be filed on behalf of the City within days after this site plan application is filed.
- Technical Review Committee. Applicant participated in a Technical Review Committee (“TRC”) meeting on February 5, 2025. Representatives of City departments and committees were in attendance, as were Applicant and its civil engineers, traffic engineers, architects, and legal consultants. Applicant believes the current proposal addresses all comments and concerns raised at the TRC meeting.
- Design Review Committee. Applicant met with the Design Review Committee (“DRC”) on an informal basis on July 15, 2025. Applicant has made a number of changes to the site plan in response to comments received at that meeting. A formal application to the DRC was made on August 5, 2025, and Applicant anticipates being before the Committee at their regularly scheduled meeting of August 19, 2025.

Zoning Compliance. Amesbury Zoning Ordinance Section XI. Q: Smart Growth Zoning District 10.5 Development and Performance Stand

The proposed site plan has been carefully designed to meet and/or exceed the Design and Performance Standards outlined in Section 10.5 of the Amesbury Zoning Ordinance, Section XI.Q – Smart Growth

Zoning District. The project reflects a thoughtful integration of transportation, environmental protection, landscaping, and community amenities to create a development that serves both residents and the greater Amesbury community. The proposal seeks no variances or waivers from the criteria set forth in the RH-MFOD. Further, the proposal fully realizes the quality, standards and spirit of the Residential Pattern Book for Rocky Hill incorporated by reference into the RH-MFOD ordinance.

Both the South and North Neighborhoods are designed with traditional streetscapes emphasizing walkability, active and passive recreation, and traditional residential-scale architecture while de-emphasizing automobiles and parking. Among the distinguishing features of the South Neighborhood are a diverse mix of homes including single-family, duplex, triplex and quadplexes. The architecture is traditional and varied. The predominant scheme is for front yards and front doors to be prominent along street fronts, with garage parking “rear loaded” and accessed by less visible alleys. A formal green space anchored by a community building is featured toward the entrance of the community. Further in, a formal “greenway” serves as both a community space and a strong connector to a pocket park and surrounding conservation areas along the southeastern perimeter.

The boulevard becomes a roundabout at a “pinch point” between the South and North Neighborhoods, serving to distinguish the two neighborhoods and be a traffic calming measure. Just off the roundabout, public parking provides access to the perimeter trail network, together with a shade structure and seating area serving trail users.

The boulevard narrows to an undivided roadway as it enters the North Neighborhood. Two prominent community buildings – a clubhouse and recreation “fieldhouse” – greet visitors immediately upon entering the neighborhood. A formal “village green” is situated at the junction of the boulevard and arterial drive. The North Neighborhood will stand out for its design of 29 separate residential buildings, unique for a multifamily rental community. All residential buildings are of traditional design and will range from 8 to 36 residences. As in the South Neighborhood, most community parking is located to the rear of residential buildings, with guest parking predominantly parallel parking along the principal drives. Resident parking will be a combination of individual garages and surface parking.

Section XI. Q. 10.5 A. – Access & Traffic Impacts

Traffic and safety impacts on City roadways have been minimized through the use of a single existing curb cut on Elm Street, supplemented by emergency access via the existing Amesbury Animal Hospital parking lot. A detailed Transportation Impact Study is included with this submission.

Interior circulation for both vehicles and pedestrians has been carefully planned to reduce conflicts and encourage walking and cycling. Road widths have been reduced to the full extent possible while still satisfying fire and emergency vehicles. Traffic-calming features such as roundabouts and marked crosswalks serve to slow car speeds and provide pedestrians with a sense of safety. Pathways and walking trails have been interconnected to maximize walkability and provide direct access to all areas of the site, including a public parking lot serving the trail network.

Section XI. Q. 10.5 B. - Parking

Ample parking has been provided for both residents and guests, while minimizing the visual impact of parking areas. The majority of spaces are located behind buildings or within homeowners’ private garages. On-street parking spaces will remain undedicated, encouraging shared use between residents, visitors, and members of the public. This design approach balances functionality with aesthetics, supporting a pedestrian-oriented streetscape. Parking is provided at a ratio of 2.87 spaces per residence

in the South Neighborhood (which quantity is largely driven by most homes having a 2-car garage), and 1.68 spaces per residence in the North Neighborhood. Not included in these totals are 7 spaces off the roundabout dedicated to public trail access.

Section XI. Q. 10.5 C. - Landscaping

The landscape design announces the new community entrance along Elm Street with stone walls and planting. The boulevard entry and all new streets are framed by street trees planted 40 feet on-center. Rail fences and low plantings further reinforce the entry experience leading up to the first buildings after which front walks, porches, and foundation planting frame the typical streetscape. Common areas feature open lawns, walks, event spaces, pergola shaded seating areas, and park-scale plantings.

Wooded open spaces surround each Neighborhood and will be permanently protected with conservation easements. Retaining walls are used to limit disturbance in a few critical areas and all face away from the new residences. The edges of disturbance along these perimeter areas will be re-vegetated and trail connections established between the new sidewalk network and the existing trails beyond the proposed limit of work.

The landscape design within the North Neighborhood is scaled to the larger flat-style apartment buildings and to soften the impact of the more extensive surface parking areas. Additionally, the common areas are sized and configured to provide outdoor amenities for apartment residents. These include a pool and grilling area, pickleball courts, dog park, and a cornhole lawn that are part of the community and rec building campus at the entrance to the North Neighborhood. All of these amenities orient to the surrounding open space. In contrast, the large Village Green at the heart of the North Neighborhood is framed on all sides by apartment buildings. The Green includes open lawn, covered seating, grilling, and dining areas. A smaller, similar green at the far end of the neighborhood includes similar features on a lesser scale. Care was taken throughout the plan to make these pedestrian connections and to provide multiple ways to crisscross the two neighborhoods on foot.

The site design with mixed building types with varying orientations demands close attention to plant selections and specifications. Native, drought resistant species will be used and the multiyear build-out and implementation of the plan will ensure on-going maintenance until all plantings are established at which time care will be handed off to a homeowner's association and property management as appropriate.

Section XI. Q. 10.5 D. - Open Space

As described above, a significant portion of the site will remain in its natural, forested condition except for a network of walking trails accessible to both residents and the general public. Formal and informal open green spaces have been strategically located to ensure close proximity to all residents within both the North and South Neighborhoods. These open spaces are linked by a system of sidewalks and trails, fostering connectivity and community interaction. Deed restrictions will ensure the permanent protection of wetlands, stream corridors and other sensitive environmental areas.

Section XI. Q. 10.5 F, G, & H. - Stormwater Management and Erosion Control

In compliance with the Amesbury Wetlands Protection Ordinance, all proposed structures meet or exceed the required 25-foot minimum setback from wetlands. A comprehensive Stormwater Management Report, included herein, demonstrates that best management practices will be

implemented to protect water quality and manage runoff. Permanent vegetative erosion controls will be installed in accordance with Soil Conservation Service recommendations. The project has been designed to maximize groundwater recharge and ensure groundwater quality protection in accordance with Smart Growth Zoning District requirements.

Section XI. Q. 10.5 I. Hazardous Materials

Although none are anticipated beyond cleaning and similar uses typical in a large-scale housing community, the storage, use, transport, and disposal of any hazardous or explosive materials will comply fully with all applicable Amesbury Fire Department, state, and federal regulations.

Section XI. Q. 10.5 J. - Lighting

Site lighting has been designed to ensure safety while minimizing glare and visual intrusion. Parking lot light poles will not exceed 18 feet in height, and driveway and walkway lighting will not exceed 12 feet. Preferred light fixture designs are detailed in the enclosed landscape architecture plans.

Section XI. Q. 10.5 K, L, & M. - Environmental, Noise, and Utilities

All environmental and noise performance standards outlined in the Smart Growth District Ordinance, as well as MEPA requirements, will be met. The project is expected to have minimal noise impact on surrounding properties, with natural buffers such as trees and vegetation providing additional screening. All utilities, including electric, telephone, and cable, will be installed underground. The proposed development is consistent with the City's Planned Infrastructure Report and Capital Improvement Plan. This proposal reflects a balanced approach to growth—one that supports Amesbury's goals for sustainable development, environmental stewardship, and enhanced quality of life for residents and visitors alike.

SUMMARY

Consistent with the purpose and intent of Section 1.0 (Purpose) the Rocky Hill Multi-Family Overlay District ("RH-MFOD"), Section XI.V of the Amesbury Zoning Code, Rocky Hill:

1. Encourages a diversity of housing by offering both rental and for-sale housing opportunities;
2. Provides for a full range of housing choices for households of all incomes, ages, and sizes in order to meet the goal of preserving Amesbury's unique community character;
3. Increases the production of a range of housing units to meet existing and anticipated housing needs as outlined in the City of Amesbury Housing Production Plan;
4. Establishes requirements, standards, and guidelines, and ensures predictable, fair and cost-effective development review and permitting consistent with the requirements of the MBTA Communities Law;
5. Establishes flexible development standards to allow context-sensitive design and creative site planning that protect neighborhood property values and enhance its unique natural, cultural and historic resources consistent with the standards and design objectives described in the Rocky Hill Residential Pattern Book;
6. Encourages the permanent preservation of contiguous open space, scenic vistas, forested land, wildlife, other natural resources and features, including aquifers, waterbodies, and wetlands, in a manner that is consistent with the current Master Plan and Open Space Plan;

7. Encourages a more efficient and compact form of development that consumes less open land and natural materials and conforms to existing topography and natural features in a manner more effective than a conventional development; and,
8. Implements the requirements as an MBTA Community whereby the City is identified as an “Adjacent Community” pursuant to State regulatory requirements, and in a manner consistent with the City of Amesbury’s Action Plan for MBTA Communities, all as required under Section 3A of MGL c. 40A; and,
9. Lastly, the RH-MFOD Ordinance creates as of right zoning for multi-family housing, which in turn, will enable the City to be eligible for funds from grant and other assistance programs offered by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.