



Building, Plumbing, Gas, Electric, Zoning, & Health

RECEIVED D: 12/19/24
By City Clerk at 9:57 am, May 23, 2025

MINUTES of the ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS MEETING
THURSDAY, March 27, 2025

(Posted in accordance with the provisions of MGL Ch. 39, Sec. 23A, as amended)

City Hall – 7:00 p.m.
62 Friend St.
Amesbury, MA 01913

Attendance: Sharon McDermot (Chair), David Haraske, Charles Basler

Absent: Donna Collins, Michael McCarthy

Also in attendance: Zoning Compliance Officer Jim Wilson, Community Development Coordinator Becky Frey, Planning Director Nipun Jain

Call to Order

Chair Sharon McDermot called the meeting to order at 7:04 pm.

Roll Call/Attendance

Minutes for Approval – 02/27/25

Charles Basler motioned to approve the minutes from the 2-27-25 ZBA Meeting. Seconded by David Haraske. The motion passed unanimously.

Topics for Discussion:

1. Housing Support

Chair Sharon McDermot read the legal notice into the record.

Applicant Paula Newcomb commented that Housing Support Inc. has been in existence since 1990 and they have owned this property for 34 years. They are a non-profit organization that houses low-income people who are very often disabled and may be in need of services because they are victims of domestic violence or in recovery. They also provide

Jim Wilson, Director
Municipal Development Center • 39 South Hunt Road • Amesbury, MA 01913
P (978) 300-8151 • tironev@amesburyma.gov

[MAKE HISTORY HERE](#)



services to veterans in some of their buildings. They have 8 buildings across Merrimack Valley and one soon to open in New Hampshire. The goal of the project is to house 8 additional residents in the assisted women's program at 276 Main St. These units would be for folks who have been going through the program and have graduated to an independent living situation. The project team includes Bob Jones, the president of Housing Support Inc., Architects Randy Johnson and Paul Martel, Engineer TJ Melvin, and Attorney Steve Nolan.

Attorney Steve Nolan commented that they have applied for a comprehensive permit 40B review. The ZBA is charged with reviewing and issuing that permit. They have submitted a list of ways the proposal does not meet the zoning requirements. There were 8 specific items that they referred to ranging from the use itself, the maximum building area, yard deviations, and adding an accessory building for administration and maintenance. There is a provision about a reduction of lot areas, which states if you are adding structures that takes compliance away from existing structures then you would need to apply for a waiver. That is a complicated analysis, and they are unclear if they need this waiver, but included it just in case. They also included parking. The city requires 1.5 spaces per unit, and they are providing 8 spaces for the 8 units which they believe is adequate. Mr. Nolan was happy to address any questions on the 40B process.

Architect Randy Johnson commented that the site is close to the Bartlett Museum, which is the birthplace of Josiah Bartlett. This facility has been a women's program for a while. They are providing 8 new residences for program graduates. Randy Johnson showed an aerial view of the property. The site currently has a main building, a veterans' building, and an FCF building. The proposed layout would add 5 new buildings. The application is proposing 4 duplexes and a maintenance and administration building. The parking will be completely reconfigured as part of this project. They will be removing the parking from the front of the main building and the veterans' building. The footprints of the new buildings are similar to the size of the surrounding houses in the neighborhood. They are 880 sf and there will be 2 units per building. They are compact one-bedroom units. There is a connection to Bartlett Place. Originally, they thought it was necessary for emergency access, but they will be able to access the site from Main St. The compact version of the individual buildings have a good relationship with Bartlett Place. They are across from an open space area, so there is a pretty good distance from neighboring buildings.

David Haraske questioned how many residents were housed in the existing residence. Paula Newcomb responded that the main building has 14 units. Randy Johnson commented that they currently have 13 parking spaces on site. There will be 23 parking spaces with the new configuration. There will be one accessible unit closest to the main building. One parking space will have a vehicle charging station near the administration and maintenance building. There will also be open space area. They are trying to preserve as much of the vegetation as possible along the site. The southern border has a dilapidated chain-link fence that will be replaced in its entirety. The eastern side has an adequate chain link that will remain. It will need minor repairs. Bartlett Place has two styles of fence. The stockade fence will be replaced completely, and they will

Jim Wilson, Director

Municipal Development Center • 39 South Hunt Road • Amesbury, MA 01913
P (978) 300-8151 • tironev@amesburyma.gov

MAKE HISTORY HERE



replace the picket fence in kind. Each unit has an outdoor space connected with it to use. There is no change proposed to the interior of the existing three buildings. They will be removing 2 fire escapes on the main building to allow for a sidewalk to connect from the back of the site to Main St. They will be resetting the curbing along Main St. The new parking arrangement will require the ADA ramp on the FCF building to be reconfigured. They are calling the proposed duplexes “cottages;” one style has a hip roof the other style has a gable roof. Some units are staggered to give variety. The siding for the hip roof is clapboard siding and the gable roof is shingle siding. The last proposed building is the administration and maintenance building. It is a larger footprint than the duplexes. It will provide office space for Housing Support Inc. There will be a picket fence along Bartlett Place.

TJ Melvin commented that they are proposing to catch all runoff from the new proposed parking at the rear of the existing buildings with catch basins and sub surface treatment systems. They will catch the new buildings’ roof runoff as well. They are not increasing any runoff on the relatively flat site. The majority of the front of the site will remain unchanged for storm water treatment. They will reinstall the curbing and narrow the driveway access to 20 feet wide. They will bring an 8-inch sewer line and an 8-inch water main to the back.

David Haraske questioned what they were proposing for heating mechanicals. TJ Melvin responded that they were planning on electric heat at this time. David Haraske questioned if they were running gas to the new buildings. TJ Melvin responded that they were not proposing to. Randy Johnson responded that the intent is for these units to be all electric with a heat pump water heater.

Charles Basler clarified that there would not be any increased run off from today. TJ Melvin responded that they will be treating the water starting at the midpoint of the site and back for all the new buildings. The front part of the existing buildings will be treated how they are today. There will be a net decrease in runoff for the entire site. Charles Basler questioned how they would be treating the runoff. TJ Melvin responded that they would go through the separator before entering the sub surface treatment system. Then it will infiltrate into the ground. There will not be any discharge from those systems. The runoff will go to multiple catch basins located on site and then it will be treated. Charles Basler questioned if there was a specific plan of the treatment system. TJ Melvin responded that it was on the grading and drainage sheet.

Charles Basler questioned if the proposed units would be for one individual per unit. Paula Newcomb confirmed that each individual unit will have its own lease for one person. It will be handled the same as the other existing units are handled today. Charles Basler questioned how they handle situations where there are more people than allowed in a unit. Paula Newcomb responded that was not allowed.

Charles Basler commented that they mentioned removing the exterior fire escape and questioned if taking away some of the life safety devices was adequate. Randy Johnson responded that they talked to their code

Jim Wilson, Director

Municipal Development Center • 39 South Hunt Road • Amesbury, MA 01913
P (978) 300-8151 • tironev@amesburyma.gov

[MAKE HISTORY HERE](#)



expert on that proposal. The second floor has one existing open stair and an additional fire escape on the north side of the building. It meets applicable standards, and the building has full fire suppression.

Charles Basler questioned how they will handle the border between Bartlett Place and the new development. Bartlett Place is not a traditional road with proper grading. Charles Basler questioned how they would address runoff concerns and landscaping along that border. TJ Melvin responded that there will be fencing along the property line. There will be swale to get the water around to the treatment areas. They are putting the treatment areas in locations that the water is already flowing. Today the water is running off uncontrolled. This proposal will be catching it and treating it. They are decreasing the runoff on the site.

Chair Sharon McDermot questioned if there was concern about flooding on Bartlett Place. TJ Melvin responded there was not. Today runoff flows from Bartlett Place to this site. They will be using a swale to direct the runoff for the back of the site. They are not proposing any stormwater changes to the front of the site.

David Haraske questioned if they did a perk test and if there were decent soils with high infiltration on the site. TJ Melvin responded that they based their calculations on soil texture and water table height. David Haraske responded that they may want to do a perk because there is a lot more volume coming off the rainwater. TJ Melvin responded that the way they calculated the stormwater infiltration is more conservative than a perk test.

Randy Johnson added that the Bartlett Place side cottages will have gutters and the roof runoff will be directed to the underground storm water systems.

Charles Basler questioned if there were any traffic counts done or concern on the traffic flow. TJ Melvin responded that they did not do any traffic counts based on the increase of 8 single occupancy units. There will not be a large increase in traffic. There should not be an impact.

Chair Sharon McDermot opened the public hearing.

Meryl Goldsmith of 8 Cleveland St. commented that she is a direct abutter. The Housing Support Inc site notes that it provides housing to low income, homeless, and disabled. The application states there are already 21 units across the 3 buildings. The Bartlett Cottages project will be marketed to households. Will these units be open to Amesbury residents or people on a state list? What does a graduate from the program mean? The applicant wants an exemption for the size of the buildings as the rules say only 24 by 24 is allowed. This administration and maintenance building should not qualify for those variances. Can the items needed in this building be housed by a 10 by 12-foot shed? The dumpster location is 20 feet from a private residence

Jim Wilson, Director

Municipal Development Center • 39 South Hunt Road • Amesbury, MA 01913
P (978) 300-8151 • tironev@amesburyma.gov

MAKE HISTORY HERE



swimming pool. Why can't they do trash bins like everyone else? The street width is usually 24 feet wide, but this is proposed to be 20 feet. This will create access difficulty for emergency vehicles and snow removal. The fence proposed on Bartlett Place are so close to the houses and they will block the sunlight. They are planning to replace the chain link fence, which means they will need to take the existing one down. Ms. Goldsmith was not ok with that. It looks like they are cutting down all of the trees and only replacing a few. What size trees will be replanted? The large trees, including the 200-year-old sugar maple tree on the fence line, should not be removed. Ms. Goldsmith had concerns about the stockpile locations during the construction phase. There is currently an old water and sewer electric service. Is that being addressed? There have been multiple recent water main breaks. There are multiple mistakes on the application Salisbury and Methuen are referenced in error. This is not a variance to rebuild a preexisting non-conforming use. Ms. Goldsmith has lived on Cleaveland St. for 28 years. There are at least 3 abutting historically significant houses. The structures they are proposing do not match the houses or the area. This will kill my property value and disrupt my living for 8 additional people. Ms. Goldsmith had a lot of concerns about this development.

Silvia Berciano of 11 Bartlett Place commented that she moved to the United States in 2016 and this was the first home she has purchased. She has felt extremely welcomed in this community. Ms. Berciano appreciated the need for affordable housing and appreciated the work of this non-profit. However, there were concerns. Ms. Berciano noted that her abutters notice went to the previous owner. It would be good to understand who the residents would be. There are many inconsistencies in the application. How many bedrooms will these apartments have? There are 21 people living on the property already. How many of us are being harmed by this development? Having 21 plus affordable apartments will turn this block into a low-income housing hot spot. This will not help neighbors and residents. Ms. Berciano was also deeply concerned about the water runoff issue. There is a concrete area around Ms. Berciano's pool and water flows into the east side. The fence that is proposed to be replaced looks like it is encroaching on her property, she did not approve of that. The application submitted in 2022 cited that the residents were low-income single occupants with addiction or violence in their past. That is a major concern for this project. What are the conditions that prevent them from maintaining leases and what security measures are in place? How will the development address concerns on increased crime rates? Property values will be affected. There are public service infrastructure concerns. These 8 additional houses will put an added burden on the water line. The proposed dumpster location is in front of her front yard, and that was concerning.

Kim Beckman of 17 Kendrick's Court commented that her main concern was to understand who was qualified to live there. Ms. Beckman has 3 children, and the neighbors have young children as well. This proposal is in her backyard.

Rebecca O'Toole of 18 Kendrick's Court commented that she was also concerned about the qualifications for the people living there. It says that these units are for people who are unable to live in group housing. Ms. O'Toole did not want to worry about her daughters playing in the backyard.

Jim Wilson, Director

Municipal Development Center • 39 South Hunt Road • Amesbury, MA 01913
P (978) 300-8151 • tironev@amesburyma.gov

MAKE HISTORY HERE



Semle Platukis of 31 Kendrick's Court commented that it was worth repeating what has been said. This application says it is to provide shelter housing for substance abuse people who are in recovery. What is a graduate from this program and why would a graduate of the program still need access to services? Will the administration building do bed checks? How often can individuals stay over? How is that managed? Ms. Platukis questioned what the identified community need was. The proposal would get Amesbury closer to the 10% goal of affordable housing. However, this increase is negligible. This impact on low-income housing does not meet the real need. Kudos to the people who live there now because there is no public transportation. The neighborhood does not want public transportation. It is unclear where they are going for work and how they're getting there. In the applicant presentation they said there would not be any impacts to traffic, with all due respect, the residents get to decide if it is negligible or not. Main St. is already very busy. It is a main cut through and there is a large school bus stop. Why does the administrative building need to be there? Can't it stay where it currently is? The trash should be put on the other side with the administration building. Ms. Platukis questioned what the purpose of the outdoor areas for the houses was. Do they really need it? Can that be removed, so they don't encourage outdoor activities? There should be a better fence installed between this property and Bartlett Place.

Steve Pierro of Rowley, MA commented that his son and their family live at 10 Bartlett Place. When they heard about this, they were concerned about the safety for his son and their family. Mr. Pierro has heard rumors of the use of this location and is surprised no one has mentioned this. He heard rumor that ex-convicts would be living there in the future. Mr. Pierro was not sure if it was true or if this was a way to sideline and allow people to come live there. He has not had the time to do the work to figure out all the questions that need answering. Mr. Pierro's biggest concern was the rumor. The application notes that this is for individuals who experienced homelessness and domestic violence in their history. The neighbors are close together and there are children that live in the area. Mr. Pierro did not blame abutters for being concerned. Mr. Pierro has experience with substance abuse people and he knows they lie and steal. He knows how convincing they can be. They can relapse and will do anything for money. Mr. Pierro noted that he was not saying they were all bad people. The turnaround can be wonderful with the right help. It would be good to know the exact use. The water issue is also very concerning for adding more residents. There is water in the area all the time after rain or snow melt. The town does not plow Bartlett Place well because there are so many divots in the road. The water and fencing proposals are concerning.

Jennifer Williamson of 6 Bartlett Place commented that her front door faces the back of the current brick building and questioned how much space was behind the building between the back and that fence. There should be more details on how tall the fence will be and what it would be made of. What are the buildings themselves made of? Ms. Williamson's biggest concern aligned with the rest of the neighbors. How will this be monitored as far as who can live here? There is a little lane on the corner of Bartlett Place and Main St. A trailer comes a few times a week with a lot of trash. Will that be increased or related to the new maintenance building? It is unclear why they are bringing the debris there. David Haraske questioned if they were dumping

Jim Wilson, Director

Municipal Development Center • 39 South Hunt Road • Amesbury, MA 01913
P (978) 300-8151 • tironev@amesburyma.gov

MAKE HISTORY HERE



items out there. Jennifer Williamson responded that she did not know what they were doing with it. There is flooding in the back of Bartlett Place at 10 and 11. It's a one-way street and a lot of the times there is mud. Ms. Williamson commented that she grew up with low-income housing and worked hard to get out of it. She moved to Bartlett Place because she loves old houses and moved there to be in a safe quiet place. That is a gem of a neighborhood, and she was concerned about preserving that and keeping it safe.

Charles Basler questioned if the applicant had done any outreach to the surrounding community other than the documents referenced. Randy Johnson responded that they did have a meeting back in 2022 and invited all abutters. They held an initial meeting at the site. At that time, it was roughly the same design.

Chair Sharon McDermot commented that they have some motions that they are going to propose, and they are going to continue this application to the May 22, 2025, Meeting.

Sharon McDermot entered the motions into the record.

1. Motion to retain Stantec, the peer review consultant for engineering services currently providing peer review services to the Amesbury Planning Board.
2. Motion to authorize the Office of Community and Economic Development to prepare the scope of work and request Stantec to provide a contract.
3. Motion to authorize the peer review consultant to start review, provided the ZBA has received sufficient funds towards the peer review contract, and upon receipt of plans and documents.
4. Motion to send this project to the Technical Review Committee, Planning Board, Historical Commission, and Design Review Committee for them to review and provide comment.

Charles Basler motioned to approve the motions read into the record by Chair Sharon McDermot. Seconded by David Haraske. The motion passed unanimously.

David Haraske commented that the abutters seemed unsure of how many people were currently living at the property and questioned if the applicant could clarify that. Paula Newcomb responded that the existing main building at 276 Main St. called Bartlett House has 14 rooms. The white building along Main St. has three 2 bed units for veterans. The existing building at 280 Main St. is a group home for women and it has 4 bedrooms.

Chair Sharon McDermot questioned how individuals qualify to live on the property. Paula Newcomb responded that the program has been around for a long time. There is staff on site. Individuals can apply to be part of the program and there is an extensive review which includes a CORI. A CORI reviews folks records and it includes some of the issues spoken about. If the CORI reveals any issues, then the person is not accepted to the program. The one exception they may make is a DUI because this program is for those in recovery. Chair Sharon McDermot clarified that if they do not pass the CORI, then they would not be



accepted. Paula Newcomb confirmed that was correct. Housing Support Inc. is about helping people trying to stay sober and victims of domestic violence.

Chair Sharon McDermot questioned how long people live there. Paula Newcomb responded it was permanent housing. This program has been going on 6 years. Some residents have been there the entire 6 years, and some have been there 3-4 or less. Most residents are in their 60s. There are a few in their 40s-50s.

Charles Basler questioned if they could explain the program. Paula Newcomb responded that the program provides a safe place where people can live together with shared kitchens and living rooms. They can have access to counseling. Pettengill House provides services. There is a bus for Northern Essex Community College that can be flagged at the corner. Charles Basler clarified that the proposed 8 units were an extension of the program. Paula Newcomb confirmed that was correct.

Charles Basler motioned to continue the application for 276, 278 and 280 Main St. to the May 22, 2025, Zoning Board of Appeals meeting. Seconded by David Haraske. The motion passed unanimously.

Chair Sharon McDermot commented that they hoped this would provide time to receive comments from the committees they referred the application to.

Chair Sharon McDermot noted that there were not any further items on the agenda.

David Haraske motioned to adjourn the meeting at 8:25 pm. Seconded by Charles Basler. The motion passed unanimously.

THE MEETING ADJOURNED AT 8:25 PM

NEXT MEETING: May 22, 2025