

The Commons at Windekind

Environmental Impact Statement

The Town of Huntington's Design Review Board requires a written description of any potentially adverse environmental effects (i.e.: visual, noise, light, dust, smoke and similar phenomena) which may be associated with our proposed development.

1. Here is our short response:

Visual: The proposed project places a very high emphasis of aesthetics and the overall appearance from the perspective of architecture and landscape design. Accordingly, we have developed our own internal Design Standards and review process that insures and supports high aesthetic standards. none of the proposed development will interrupt any mid or long range view-sheds as seen from public vantage points.

Noise: The proposed project will result in normal residential construction noise during business hours of the construction phase. While this noise may in some instances travel further than the property boundary, it is not out of keeping with existing road, agricultural, forestry and small business noise already present in the immediate neighborhood. Once construction is complete, only noise typical of rural-scale residential habitation will be produced. We will stage construction to minimize noise.

Dust: There has never been a dust issue of any sort at the farm because of our end of the road location that insures that vehicles can't go fast enough to make dust. We don't foresee any dust issue during construction, but if there was one we would take mitigating measures such as covering open dusty areas with wood chips, and that hold moisture and prevents wind erosion. We can also spray dust areas with water, as needed.

Light: Our designs discourages the use high intensity lighting that would light large areas like parking lots. We expect that our new structures will have one or two traditional low intensity downward facing out door lamps, but there will be no street lamps nor upward facing lights.

Smoke: Our design standards place a very high emphasis of high green construction standards and the application of alternative energy infrastructure especially solar, therefore we are designing in a manner in which buildings have minimal smoke emissions and most of that will be bio-mass smoke. Currently, as part of our focus on alternative energy, we are exploring and plan to use more efficient pellet or chip boilers.

Traffic: Our design standards place a strong emphasis on a creating a local economy of professional offices, studios and shops, in part, because we want to reduce automobile dependence. However, there will be a traffic increase that we estimate will be in the range of 20-25 trips per day project because the project also encourages members, as part of an integrated and diverse economy, have jobs and careers elsewhere. We plan to work with the town and our neighbors on how to best accommodate these increases. (our trip calculations are based on an informal analysis of local trip patterns given such family variables as: size, age and location of employment.

1. Here is our longer and more comprehensive response:

We are driven by our Mission Statement and its supporting principles, it reads:

*“The Mission of the Commons is to be a neighborhood community that is aesthetically uplifting, culturally rich, and economically and **environmentally sustainable.**”*

In order to give our Mission more specificity and operational detail we developed 15 Principles that focus on many aspects of the project in three main categories: social, economic and **environmental**. The word **environmental** and its importance to us that has triggered a great deal of thought and effort into exploring and developing all aspects of the projects impact, both positive and negative.

Below, we are submitting an overview of this effort as the second part on our **environment impact statement**.

Our Mission is supported by **15 Principles** that allow us to add detail to the Mission and be more specific about how it translates into actual design and activity on the ground.

Here is the link to the entire document: [*Principles*](#)

Below, are the **9 Principles** most relevant to **environmental impact**:

1. Build all homes and other structures to be as energy efficient as possible, utilizing construction and renewable resource technology to significantly minimize or eliminate the use of fossil fuels and apply high energy efficiency and conservation standards to all our biomass, water supply, septic and electrical systems;
2. In all our design and construction standards we strive to design and build in a manner that minimizes noise, congestion, traffic, smoke pollution, soil erosion and factors, like an over dependence on parking areas, that contribute to an unsightly landscape;
3. Hold all remaining acres, about 120 acres, under common ownership protected by stringent covenants for the purpose of protecting open space and the long term land stewardship and preservation of these resources for the Common's community, our neighbors and the greater communities of Huntington and Vermont;
4. Add value and beauty to the land through environmentally sensitive additions of gardens, orchards, ponds, rain gardens, wetlands, stonework, paths, trails, roads, public spaces, grazing areas and well managed woodland.
5. Apply Permaculture practices to build and maintain healthy, low energy regenerative ecosystems that provide an abundance of life-sustaining nourishment to the community that is locally available, enhancing our options for a low energy economy;

6. Encourage Commons members to share those things that make sense to co-own in order to make the most efficient use of purchases that because of their economy of use require less energy and consumption;
7. Encourage opportunities for local income generation like home offices, artisan shops, farming and gardening that reduces a dependence on back and forth commuting traffic while increasing the likelihood of a small interconnected local and less energy dependent economy.
8. Work and contribute with neighbors and local community organizations to environmental protection and enhancement projects. And, work, and when feasible, partner with The Camels Hump Nordic Skier Association for the purpose of enhancing non-motorized outdoor recreation in the area and the environmental awareness and appreciation that comes with hiking, biking and Nordic skiing; and
9. Be an exemplary environmental model, so that our model and principles inspire others to create their own visionary neighborhoods and communities with proven environmental standards.

Next, we took our Principles one step further by creating a set of design standards, with the purpose of promoting information gathering, idea generation, discussion and consensus decision making that generates the best design possible, including, environmental design and impact. The intent is to translate our more abstract **Principles** into more tangible and workable **Standards**.

The Design Standards do make provisions for an internal review process with a board called a **Design Review Committee (DRC)** somewhat similar to the DRB. The basic goal for this internal review process will be to foster the conversation and decision making within the community to best achieve our standards.

These provisions are part of our **By-Laws (By Laws)** as stipulated by the following:

*DESIGN REVIEW COMMITTEE: The Common hereby establishes a Design Review Committee as a permanent committee of the Community, which shall administer and perform the architectural and landscape review and control functions of the Common set forth in the **Design Standards** as to all construction and improvements made by the Common or Member Households. The Design Review Committee will consist of no less than three (3) and no more than five (5) members and shall be elected by the Community.*

Here is the link to the entire document: [**Design Standards**](#)

There are design standards in four major areas:

1. **Economy, sustainability and affordability.**
2. **Land Use and Architecture,**

3. **Energy and Resources and**
4. **Community**

Below, are examples from each section:

Economy, Sustainability and Affordability-

Encourage maintenance procedures designed for ease of upkeep with the least impact on the environment and the community. For example, minimize the use of paint and other materials that require frequent upkeep or replacement. Utilize window sashes that are aluminum clad and painted in order to reduce maintenance and improve efficiency. Build with durable and weather resistant materials like stone and timber frame.

Land use and Architecture-

Design with Nature. The farm has a very visually interesting and varied landscape containing such features as dramatic views, small, almost self-contained pocket, semi secluded environments, large rock outcroppings, streams, wetlands, varied slopes from steep to nearly flat, stone walls and woodland diversity that ranges from Maple and Beech groves to large stands of mature Norway Spruce that was planted in the 1930s. Wildlife, soils, plant species are very varied and rich throughout.

This varied landscape, although rugged, is nearly ideal for small self-contained residential lots as even close buildings will protect privacy, while offering plenty of opportunity for creative landscaping, with trails, small gardens and grass areas that blend with the dramatic features on the natural environment mentioned above.

Design then works the way that nature does, it does this by finding and weaving patterns between natural elements like a brook, a hillside, the plants and animals that live there, humans and our goals and our purposes are always part of this beautiful matrix. Use **“biological resources”** and **“make the least change for the greatest effect.”** are credos that guide us; this is the nature that we seek to design with.

Energy and Resources:

Encourage that all new construction with South Facing roofs so that solar panels can be located on them and other land features such as retaining walls, the location of heat retaining ponds, south facing open spaces for garden and farm land be designed to maximize solar gain that will enhance the communities' options with plantings and animal habitats that require more

protected and warmer temperatures Utilize swales, trees and bushes in wind breaks, contouring as a means to slow down water and plant in guilds trees, scrubs, flowers and vegetables.

Community:

Encourage the establishment and maintenance of buffers. (e.g. walls, green spaces, wet lands, and gardens) to ensure community privacy and to reduce impact on neighboring properties. Encourage private backyard and private spaces screened by dense plantings, fences, and building geometry's. Develop transitional spaces, such as individual walkways gardens and porches that lead to and open into the Common spaces. The idea is to create a lively integration of private, transitional and public spaces creating, from a social perspective an interesting, compelling, diverse and dynamic design.

and

Proactively enact standards that have positive impact on our surrounding neighborhood and community. We have developed a **proactive** approach to Environmental Impact that means we want to actively, from an impact perspective, identify potentially adverse impact features in the project and as best we can ameliorate and reduce them. In addition, we want to identify potentially positive impact features and design the project to enhance and enhance them. This means a concerted effort to reach out to our surrounding community and solicit their input, concerns and ideas so that what we are doing enhances the quality of life experience and properties of our neighbors and vice-a- versa.

For example, we know that our neighbors have traffic concerns so our approach will be to work with them and the town on how the project can best ameliorate these issues. Another example that illustrates positive impact, we can work with our neighbors in a **proactive way** to develop aesthetic standards that enhance our collective enjoyment of the landscape while enhancing property values.

In Practice:

We are experiencing the above as a living and working document having an effect on the project's tangible out comes in three major ways:

1. It Guides our engineering for design and permitting purposes:

- a. For example, the standards have reduced the amount of impervious surfaces dedicated to drive ways and parking areas and helped us shape and design now driveways to foster a more pedestrian friendly community and the extensive provisions of rain gardens that are designed to absorb water and reduce run off.

- b. A second example is seen in how we established lot boundaries, instead of running lots of arbitrary straight lines we tried to use natural features like streams, rock out cropping, stone walls, contour historic roads and trails to define lines and we also established zones in the project to foster connectivity between different areas of the project.
- 2. A guide for evaluating, modifying and developing us by Laws' deeds and covenants insuring provisions for such items as: rights of users of common land, maintenance questions and who is responsible, rights of ways, etc.**
- 3. It influences who comes into the projects and their goals once joined:**

- a. At the moment two families and three more families are actively considering the project. In the run up to joining we learned that interested families pay a great deal of attention to our Mission and Principles and the Design Standards, in all cases these goals have been an important factor in their decision to join and once they have joined a major factor in construction and land use decisions.

Overall, we are achieving an important symmetry of goals and purposes with new members that should give our neighbors, the town and state boards confidence that we will do what we say because of the strength of our evolving community is behind these goals from the start.

Trying to calculate these impacts is an exciting and creative challenge for the project that we have addressed by doing a fair amount of readings and research and working with experts like Aaron Worthley and Dori Barton of Arrowwood environmental and Shane Mullen, the project's engineer, from Weston and Sampson, of Waterbury.

