

## **RIVER RIDGE PROJECT NARRATIVE**

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River Ridge is a proposed 18 unit Townhouse project (17 units, 2 of which are below-market-rate, plus one incentive unit), located on 2.98 acre property (hereafter, “the Property”) known as “Parcel L,” which fronts on Wolcott Avenue, with its rear property line along Beekman Street.<sup>1</sup> The Comprehensive Plan and Zoning for the property were established by the City Council in October 2016. The Applicant proposes to consolidate the existing lots and create the 18 individual for-sale lots, one for each Townhouse. The common amenity and service areas of the site will be managed by a property owner’s association. The proposed project is set forth on the updated site plan drawing set, which shows layout, landscaping and site details. A number of rendered elevations have also been submitted which show the proposed project within its neighborhood setting. (See Exhibit G) The subdivision drawings show the proposed lot layout.

During the recent 2016 zoning process, in which the allowable density on this property was significantly reduced, there was much discussion about the relationship of this site to the various types of development in the area. The applicant has prepared several exhibits (see attached Exhibit A (HLD drawing “Wolcott Avenue Neighborhood Map”) to show the Project in the context of the overall neighborhood setting. The drawings document that the proposed development is compatible with the existing scale and density of surrounding developments. Further, the proposed development (hereafter “the Project”) has been designed to complement surrounding neighborhoods and maximize compatibility and provide an appropriate transition between the various existing and proposed housing and other uses in the area.

The following provisions describe the manner in which the Project addresses specific aspects of the neighborhood setting and Comprehensive Plan goals.

### **PROJECT SETTING: WATERFRONT AND TRAIN STATION AREA**

The Property is located within the one-half mile radius identified by the City of Beacon as the “Waterfront and Train Station Area” (see graphic on page 148 of the 2017 Comprehensive Plan).

#### ***Project Features to complement the Setting:***

The Project emphasizes interconnectivity with the train station. From the southern boundary of the site, the applicant proposes to construct, within the city-owned Ferry Street cul-de-sac, a set of concrete steps that provide access to and from the train station to the sidewalk along Wolcott Avenue at Ferry Street. This set of public stairs will provide a safer means of pedestrian movement in this location than the trail and rope system that is currently being used by commuters and will further the Comprehensive Plan’s goal of enhancing connectivity from the Train Station to the City’s downtown area.

At the northerly portion of the Property, the applicant proposes to construct an additional internal pedestrian path for project residents, providing a further connection to the train station. The

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<sup>1</sup> Applicant has selected Wolcott Avenue as its frontage, in accordance with the City Code.

pathway will pass through a landscaped area of the Property located between Hammond Plaza and the church cemetery. Landscaping and vegetation in the area will be improved with supplemental plantings and the removal of invasive and non-native growth. Healthy and specimen trees will be retained and supplemented with additional vegetation.

The Project also proposes a small pocket park, to be open to the public from dawn to dusk, located on the Property close to Beekman Street. This area will be improved with benches and landscaping. As it is not intended for use after dark, it will not be lighted; this is in keeping with the City's park and trail policies. Beekman Street currently lacks any identified pocket parks (2017 Comprehensive Plan update, Figure 9-1 Community Facilities, and Figure 9-2 Open Space and Recreation.) This proposal is consistent with the 2017 Comprehensive Plan update which recommends pocket parks along Beekman Street, and a variety of staircases/connections between Beekman Street and the higher elevations in the City. (2017 Comprehensive Plan Update, pages 157-158 and Figure 10-3) The proposed pocket park also provides a well-designed and landscaped usable open space area at least 2,000 SF in size (residential use schedule, note k).

### **PROJECT SETTING: HAMMOND PLAZA**

The Property has approximately 480 feet of frontage on Wolcott Avenue. Historically, the eastern portion of the site was separated from the western portion (and from what is now Hammond Plaza) by a city street known as Chandler Street, which contained a number of houses and other buildings. (See attached Map obtained courtesy of Beacon Historical Society, Exhibit B)

The rear line of the Property wraps around the eastern and northern sides of Hammond Plaza and continues for approximately 180 feet along Beekman Street. Historically, there were as many as five single-family homes along Beekman Street in this area. (Exhibit B)

### ***Project Features to complement setting:***

The Project is oriented to Wolcott Avenue and away from Hammond Plaza. The only vehicular entrance is proposed from Wolcott Avenue.

No buildings are proposed in the area of the Property north of Hammond Plaza, which remains in the "L-Linkage" district, nor will there be any proposed vehicular access on that part of the Property. The only proposed improvement is the placement of the internal pedestrian path toward the train station and the small proposed public pocket park. The pocket park and the path are placed in the northerly portion of this area, away from Hammond Plaza. The pocket park will not be lighted as it would be open only from dawn to dusk in keeping with City policies. The internal pedestrian path would have solar lighting, low to the ground. Signage just beyond (east of) the pocket park would indicate the demarcation between public space and private space reserved for River Ridge residents.

Along the north-south axis, a retaining wall is proposed between the River Ridge parking improvements and Hammond Plaza. The placement of the wall has been designed to retain a vegetated setback from the shared property line. The placement of the retaining wall allows installation of site improvements for River Ridge while retaining existing vegetation within the land area between River Ridge and Hammond Plaza. All areas disturbed by the wall construction will be promptly revegetated with native trees, shrubs, and meadow grass species. Site section

diagrams, submitted with the application, show that the proposed plan fosters privacy for the two separate parcels. The placement of the two retaining walls provides space for landscaping on top of the lower wall and, therefore, screening for both walls. The shrubs proposed for planting in front of the retaining walls, *Viburnum rhytidophyllum* (*Leatherleaf Viburnum*) and *Viburnum rhytidophylloides* (*Alleghany Viburnum*), are evergreen native species that will provide four season coverage, flowers in the Spring, small fruits in the Fall, which are valuable food for autumn/winter birds. The foliage of the shrubs is also essential food for many butterflies and moths. At maturity, the shrubs grow to 10'-15' high and 8'-10' wide. The applicant proposes to plant the shrubs at 5'-o.c., which will allow the shrubs to grow together into an uninterrupted hedge, and their mature height will provide full coverage of the walls.

From the time of planting, we expect the shrubs to reach mature height within four growing seasons. Rendered elevation views of the wall have been provided to show the nature of the landscaping within the wall.

For the wall itself, we are proposing to use a modular concrete block system in a dark grey color with rust accents. By using a dark color material with a stone texture, the visual impact of the wall recedes and increases the visual sense of distance and space. Written materials have also been provided showing the proposed color of the wall. In addition to the proposed screening and the earth tone colors of the wall, the wall design has been revised to be sloped in the area between the top and bottom wall, thereby reducing the exposed height of the top wall. An added benefit of this modification is that the proposed vegetation will be at a slightly higher starting elevation, which will reduce the time necessary to totally screen the wall.

**PROJECT SETTING: OLD DUTCH REFORMED CHURCH, A NATIONAL REGISTER SITE:**

The Property, though long vacant, is placed within the City Historic Overlay District because of its proximity to the Old Dutch Reformed Church, located immediately to the north. The church was designed by Frederick Clarke Withers; it was built in 1859 and dedicated in 1861. The church spire was added in 1880. Withers practiced architecture with Andrew Jackson Downing and Calvert Vaux. He also designed Tioranda, the Tioronda school, and St. Luke's Church. The structure itself is in High Victorian Gothic style, popular in the 1840's and 1850's. The exterior is brick, laid in English bond. The Church was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1979.

The residence which now serves as the Parsonage to the Church is located just north of the Church. The residence formerly located just south of the Church was located on what is now Parcel "L," the Property. A Sanborn map from 1897 indicates that this home then served as rectory to the Reformed Church.

The residential building formerly standing on the Property was three stories tall with wraparound porches, and had a cupola. Three separate residential structures were also located on the Property and were directly placed against the shared property line with the Reformed Church. The first was directly along the property line facing the rear of the church building. The second and third were placed directly against the shared property line with the cemetery. (Map, Exhibit B, photos Exhibit C) By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the church parsonage had moved to the north of the church, and the large building on the Property became the site of the "Riverview Institute," a "home

for nervous invalids,” operated by Dr. C. M Kittredge. (Exhibit C, drawing and photos courtesy Beacon Historical Society). It is unknown exactly when the various buildings on the property were demolished. The 1979 National Register nomination of the Church acknowledges that “much of the historic core of Fishkill Landing was lost to urban renewal project during the 1960’s and 1970’s.” For many years, the only structure that remains on the Property is an early 20<sup>th</sup> century granite gazebo (called a “summer house” on the Sanborn Map, Exhibit B. It is now in disrepair, and long subject to overgrowth. (Photo, exhibit D)

The church building is set back from the street about 50 yards. The parsonage building, just north of the church, is much closer to Wolcott Avenue. The present alignment of Wolcott Avenue, and the deep setback of the church, limit viewing opportunities along Wolcott Avenue to a very short distance, if driving. (Photos, Exhibit E) Those walking along the sidewalks have a better opportunity to appreciate the view of the church.

Proceeding south of the former “Riverview Institute,” historic maps indicate that houses south of the Riverview institute were located very close to the street (formerly Ferry and now Wolcott). (Exhibit B)

***Project features to complement setting:***

The Project has been designed to align with the setback from Wolcott Avenue established by the parsonage and the proposed West End Loft project, north of the parsonage. The resulting uniform streetscape will frame the church’s larger setback and its more open setting. This setback is consistent with the applicable zoning, which requires a front setback with 20 foot minimum and 35 feet maximum.

The Project is also designed to complement the architecture of the church and parsonage. The materials, colors, and textures, including the predominant use of brick, complement the design of the Church. The Project has been designed so that only front elevations face the church property. The proposed layout shields the Church property from views of internal parking areas and driveways by providing a consistent view of attractive elevations of the project. A pedestrian sidewalk in front of the townhouses along the northerly property line, and landscaping along the northern property line, will soften views and provide a complementary framework for views of the Church. A series of rendered elevations have been prepared, including several which show the project in the setting of the Reformed Church. See Exhibit G attached.

To further complement the Church, the elevation on the north side of the “tower element” accessory building between units 8-13 and 14-18 will include an arched masonry opening which will allow pedestrians to walk from the sidewalk along the northerly property line to a concrete stairway to reach the garage level parking area of the project. A similar arched opening will frame the lower entrance to the stairway.

The applicant proposes to move and repair the early 20<sup>th</sup> century gazebo structure to the central green, where it will become part of the LWRP viewshed of the river from Rombout Avenue and Wolcott Avenue. In response to comments by the City Planner and the Dutchess County Planning Department, additional property near the project entrance, originally proposed for parking, has been reconfigured to become a central green with river views. The gazebo will be relocated to this green and become a main feature of the new central green, visible from the LWRP viewshed at the

intersection of Rombout Avenue/Wolcott Avenue, and by pedestrians on Wolcott Avenue as well as project residents. The landscaped green is in direct line with the significant view from the Rombout Avenue intersection, and the view will therefore include views of the gazebo within a landscaped setting.

**PROJECT SETTING: REFORMED CHURCH CEMETERY:**

Behind and to the west of the church is its disused cemetery. In 1979, when the church was nominated to the National Register, the cemetery was characterized as follows:

The cemetery has been in use from the time of the original church building (1813), but has fallen into disuse and disrepair in recent times. Many of the markers have been knocked over, victims of vandalism, weather, and overgrowth of small trees and underbrush...The markers represent the most prominent families in the area...The cemetery is remarkable for its numerous marble markers and a large number of marble obelisks. A full range of nineteenth and early twentieth century funerary art, including urn and willow engravings and wreath or flower motifs, is represented in the cemetery.

[Nomination, section 7, page 5.] The cemetery has further deteriorated since that time. (Exhibit F) (black and white photo from 1979; color pictures are recent)

***Project features to complement the setting:***

The Project will complement the cemetery. The only proposed improvement of the Property near the cemetery is the path for residents toward the train station and the pocket park. Public access will end just beyond the pocket park, and will be marked with signage. As previously noted, the park will not be lit. The only lighting of the path will be small-scale solar lighting. The Project sponsor believes that by increasing visibility of the cemetery and by providing low-intensity activity nearby, incidents of trespass and vandalism will be decreased.

Additionally, the Project Sponsor has met with the church to discuss its offer to conduct restoration within the cemetery under the supervision of an architectural historian from Hartgen Associates, to include righting of vandalized tombstones and removal of opportunistic vegetation within the area of graves. These discussions are preliminary and ongoing.

**PROJECT SETTING: LOCAL WATERFRONT REVITALIZATION PLAN:**

The Property is located within the Waterfront Revitalization Management Area. Policy 25 and 25A of the City Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan (LWRP) state the goal to “protect, restore, and enhance identified viewsheds.” One of the identified viewing points is at Rombout Avenue and Route 9D, directly at the entrance to the Project. (Coastal Policy 25/25A, Viewshed number 3) The identified viewshed is to the west, directly over the property. The LWRP identifies the view as dominated by the Reformed Church, the gazebo, and the graveyard.

Present views toward the river are limited by extensive vegetation that has grown up on the site over the last 25 years, since the initial adoption of the LWRP.

***Project features to complement the setting:***

The Project will restore and enhance the identified viewshed. The Project will provide a wide entrance directly at the viewing point, which will prominently feature views of the restored gazebo in the foreground. Views of the river will be substantially improved from what they are at present. The Project will ensure that the views will be maintained over the long term, as the view is over the primary access into the site. In response to comments by the City Planner and the Dutchess County Planning Department, the entrance to the project now overlooks a central green with river views. The gazebo is a main feature of the new central green, visible from the LWRP viewshed at the intersection of Rombout Avenue/Wolcott Avenue, and by pedestrians on Wolcott Avenue as well as project residents. The central green is in direct line with the significant view from the Rombout Avenue intersection, and will enhance this LWRP viewshed. The Project also protects and enhances views of the City from the river, in keeping with Policy 25 that “the scenic qualities of Beacon result from the combination of clustered buildings (many historic) and wooded hillsides against the backdrop of the Hudson Highlands.” A Coastal Consistency evaluation is submitted as part of the EAF which contains a complete analysis and a photo-simulation of the view from the river of Beacon showing the project in the completed condition. The Project is consistent with the Coastal Policies and improves the view of the river from Viewshed number 3. Please see LWRP Consistency statement for further detail.

**AFFORDABLE HOUSING ANALYSIS:**

The proposed number of units is 17, two of which are BMR units. The provision of the BMR units results in one bonus unit, which is located in the building south of the entrance, and a total of 18 residential units overall. The site plan was revised to include a garage for one of the BMR units.

The proposed project meets the requirements of the Affordable Housing Law. The two BMR units are townhouses, the same unit type as the remainder of the project. They meet the requirements of 223-41.10.D as to comparable size. They are not less than 75% of the size of the standard units. The lot size of the BMR units is similar to the market rate units. Both are “end” units with windows on three sides, one at the south end and one at the north. They are thus “mixed through” the development as required. They will be constructed in conjunction with the market rate units. The BMR units will be rented or sold in full conformance with the applicable provisions of the city affordable housing law.