

emailed to City Council on 22 October 2025

SUBJECT:

Council Meeting: Margin, Endicott, and High Street Smart Growth Overlay Subdistrict

Dear City Councillors,

While I appreciated the October 15, 2025, meeting with the City Council and the Planning Board, I was left with more questions regarding the Margin, Endicott, and High Street Smart Growth Overlay Subdistrict.

It is my understanding that City Council has the authority to shape the ordinance and declare the maximum dimensions allowed for construction.

Lifebridge already has a shelter in Salem. Lifebridge and Harborlight already have permanent housing in Salem. Given that homelessness is a national problem, why should the City of Salem have to provide more space than currently exists for either non-profit?

MAJORITY OPINION

On October 15, 2025, the Planning Department staff misrepresented the majority opinion of the residents of Salem when they suggested that residents are in favor of the expansion proposal and only two businesses stated their opposition. Mr Cultrera's letter to the Council on April 10, 2025, recounted the numbers in the 40R Application: 180 people are opposed to an expansion, 67 are in support of an expansion, and 875 signed a petition stating their opposition to the expansion. It should be noted that there were four letters omitted from the initial submission of the Application by the City to the Commonwealth.

Additionally, the public meetings have seen overwhelming opposition to the expansion proposal; including one meeting where the maximum room capacity had been met and people were left standing due to the lack of chairs.

BOARD REPRESENTATION

Lifebridge promised my neighborhood we would have representation on the Board of Directors of Lifebridge, but we have yet to see it. Who are the Board members from Salem serving on Lifebridge's Board and how do they represent the neighborhood around Margin Street? Ms Anne Rybicki has not contacted anybody in my neighborhood association, suggesting she is not interested in hearing from my neighbors nor acting as a liaison to my neighborhood. The other Salem resident on the board is Police Captain Burke. None of the Salem police officers will speak on matters

that might be deemed political, meaning it is disingenuous to suggest Captain Burke will act as a liaison.

BEST PRACTICES

Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll stated, "I heard clearly a consensus around making shelter brief, rare and non-recurring." So why expand a shelter in Salem based on an obsolete model not in keeping with the best practices of the Commonwealth?

Why is the developer not following best practices of separating gender, especially as their proposal shows multiple floors devoted to shelter and housing?

PEOPLE SERVED

How will Lifebridge provide various services to hundreds of people every month during construction? The developer suggested construction would be done in phases, but that curt answer does little to allay the fears of those people being served.

Will the current residents with permanent housing be given a lease for their return after construction is complete? The developer mentioned a "written description" but that is not the same as a written guarantee in the form of a lease.

HOW MANY UNITS?

There were many number of units presented on October 15, 2025, tracing the history of the changed plans and it was not clear what would be built. How do the current permanent residents factor into the proposed number of units in the expansion and the lottery? How many units will be built, exactly?

There is great confusion as to what precisely the latest plans are from Harborlight and Lifebridge. The developer, the Planning Board staff, and the Mayor all referenced different versions on October 15, 2025.

The letter from Mr Daniel to the Mayor, dated September 9, 2025, lists details about the approximate number of units as 78, which are in direct conflict with the plans listed on the Harborlight website. Mr Daniel's letter states the "development will create approximately 78 units as-of-right."

Conversely, the Mayor's letter to the Council indicates the developer would provide 41 new studio apartments. The Mayor's recommendation letter dated September 25, 2025, notes a "Project concept of October 2024 and current" implying there may be a later proposal.

The ordinance should not need to exceed the number of the Mayor's recommendation of 41 units.

MAXIMUM HEIGHT OF 52 FEET AND 6 INCHES, OR LESS

Mr Daniel's letter indicates a maximum height of 55 feet, but Harborlight and Lifebridge promised they would not exceed the height of the former church roof measuring 52 feet and 6 inches. The Mayor's recommendation is to "Preserve" the church. In addition, several City Councillors recognize the historic importance of the former church and assured neighbors they would preserve its significance. All of the properties in the Harborlight/Lifebridge proposal are defined as historic by their inherent nature of being older than 50 years old.

What are the findings from the shadow study regarding building dimensions?

I urge the Council to revise the Ordinance to reflect the Council's wishes instead of the allowable maximums. Otherwise what will prevent this developer or future development from exceeding your desires?

FINANCIALS

What is the projected cost of this project, and is that figure before or after the latest round of tariffs? Estimates in March 2025 were approximately \$65 million for construction, before the current tariffs were in effect.

Councilor Merkle indicates "Welcome Housing tax credit is majority of the capital" for this project. And what if the funding falls through? What then? President Trump has already severely cut HUD funding and has threatened to shutter federal agencies such as HUD— so it is not unreasonable to be questioning what are the alternative funding sources for the proposed expansion.

What is the business plan for Lifebridge and for Harborlight? What is their annual budget for expanded facilities, staffing, case managers, security, and operating costs?

How will Lifebridge and Harborlight provide sustained funds for operations and staffing? Lifebridge hosts an annual gala because they cannot meet their expenses without patrons, so how will they secure bigger donations for a larger facility?

What is the financial and business relationship between Lifebridge and Harborlight?

What is the financial and business relationship between the developers and the Christopher Columbus Club?

What about building out the necessary infrastructure required to accommodate this project and where will those monies come from?

How would a larger shelter expansion benefit the City of Salem in the long term? For a city with an annual budget over \$200 million, a single payment of \$168,000 is chump change.

GREEN SPACE

The 2024 proposals showed very little green space and a series of inter-connected buildings. How is their proposal in keeping with the 25% green space if the building is built up to the sidewalk?

SAFETY

In the event of an emergency, how would occupants exit any of the buildings if they are all connected and do not have access to an alley?

What is the rationale to locating a shelter in a building connected to an establishment that serves alcohol and is open to the public?

TRAFFIC

Vehicles accessing the Lifebridge buildings regularly block the sidewalk on a near-daily basis. A larger campus for Lifebridge will mean more staffing and more vehicles, leaving one to wonder where they will all park. And what about visiting nurses or friends of the permanent residents or vendors? Where is the drop-off area for delivery vehicles and how many parking spaces are being provided in the proposed expansion?

MITIGATION

What are the specific steps the developer will take to mitigate issues during construction? Our neighborhood experienced an increase in the rodent population during the construction of the Hampton Inn: what is the developer's plan to address rodents? Margin Street is a main thoroughfare for emergency vehicles: how will traffic be addressed during construction? What about the noise of driving pylons into the ground and other construction? What about noise from the HVAC system for the proposed buildings where one version had the HVAC system on the roof? A series of buildings taking up the majority of a block will create more light pollution: what about light pollution and its impact on the environment and wildlife? The proposed expansion is located on the City's Coastal Resiliency Overlay District map; what is the developers plan to accommodate potential flooding and how will they protect the vulnerable population they serve?

INFRASTRUCTURE

The proposed expansion means a greater taxing of our infrastructure. Who is responsible for the costs and the work of upgrading the water and sewer required to fulfill the greater capacity these structures would need? And what of the connections to the power grid and internet?

OVERSIGHT

What measures are in place for the City of Salem to ensure the developer follows any requirements outlined in an ordinance?

Many of these questions have been left unanswered since July 2023, and I look forward to learning the answers before the passage of the proposed ordinance.

Sincerely,
mary beth bainbridge