

# **Rhinebeck Democrats Club**

## **Summary**

### **Workforce Housing Project Reports**

Town Supervisor, Elizabeth Spinzia, had called for a special meeting of the Town Board (TB) for Tuesday, April 30, 2024, for purposes of reviewing the revised application for the Locust Hill, Workforce Housing Project (WHP).

It was learned that the agenda for this meeting had been changed. The Workforce Housing matter would not be ready for public presentation or discussion at the planned meeting. The Town Board, as the lead agency with this project, will work with the developer and anticipates having a revised plan for the Locust Hill project ready for presentation at the next Town Board meeting on Monday, May 13<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 pm.

### **WHP Background**

In the spring of 2022, Kearney Realty Group, submitted its plan to construct four housing units, containing 80 apartments, on a 23.3-acre site (Locust Hill) located between Rhinecliff Road (Rt. 308) and Astor Drive. These apartments would become part of the town's goal to provide workforce housing rentals for the area's median income (AMI) residents.

Pursuant to this proposal, the Town of Rhinebeck Planning Board (PB), Conservation Advisory Board/Waterfront Advisory Committee (CAB/WAC), and the Historic & Archaeological Preservation Advisory Committee (HAPAC) conducted visits at the Locust Hill site and submitted their findings to the Town Board in opposition to the project's location.

On November 29, 2022, the Town Board held a community workshop where information about the Locust Hill project was presented by the town's Workforce Housing Committee (WHC) and representatives from the Kearney Realty Group. The town boards and the committee listed above had presented their reports in opposition to the project's location months earlier. However, they were not invited to share their findings with the community.

The following report is a summary of the main information from the reports submitted by the aforementioned groups and can be found on the Town's website at <https://www.rhinebeckny.gov>. Scroll down to Workforce Housing Proposal. Click on that title and it will bring you to the webpage where all the documents and reports are located.

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### **WHP Reports**

#### **Kearney Realty Group**

On November 29, 2022 Kearney Realty Group submitted its report on the Locust Hill project at the Town Board community workshop. This report contained the following:

### **Why Here?**

- Site identified by Town of Rhinebeck's Workforce Housing Committee.
- Over 18 acres of developable land.
- Walkability to the Village.
- Access to water and sewer.
- Access to Rhinecliff Road and Astor Drive.
- Pre-existing zoning density.
- Minimal site constraints.

### **Development Overview**

- 23.3-acre parcel, bordering on the Village of Rhinebeck.
- 80 rental units
  - 18 one-bedrooms
  - 44 two-bedrooms
  - 18 three-bedrooms
- Up to 90% Area Median Income (AMI)
  - Max Income - \$109,260
  - Max rent - \$2,630

### **Workforce Housing Committee (WHC)**

Following the Kearney presentation, the Town of Rhinebeck Workforce Housing Committee (WHC) presented its report in support of the Locust Hill project due to the factors below:

- Contains key attributes – water, sewer
- Walkability to village center and recreation facilities
- Located in the area of highest density going back to the 2009 Comprehensive Plan
- Offers ability for screening via size parcel and trees
- Quality developer with strong track record and reputation
- Meets clearly articulated and quantified need, and will benefit local workers and seniors in a tangible, concrete way

### **Historic & Archaeological Preservation Advisory Committee (HAPAC)**

*The project is highly problematic.*<sup>1</sup>

After conducting a site visit and viewing a presentation from the Kearney development team, the HAPAC submitted its findings to the Town Board in opposition to the project's location. In its June 16, 2022 report, the committee found:

- The proposed accesses from both Rhinecliff Road and Astor Drive have sight difficulties. Also, Astor Drive is an important historic road.

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<sup>1</sup> Report to Rhinebeck Town Board from the HAPAC, June 16, 2022, found at <https://www.rhinebeckny.gov/proposed-locust-hill.html>

- The old growth forests, potential archaeology issues in and around the Darling (Baker House) house, and the design, size, and location of the 80 units and parking areas were not workable in the current proposed plans.
- The project seems to the committee to be out of step with Rhinebeck's historic character.

### **Planning Board (PB)**

*Workforce housing is desperately needed in this town,  
but is exactly here (Locust Hill) a suitable location?*<sup>2</sup>

On July 6, 2022, the PB, with comments from James Levy, Town Planning Consultant, submitted its report to the Town Board in opposition to the application. In its report, the PB stated:

While the Town of Rhinebeck Planning Board supports Workforce Housing in the Town, specific issues related to the project on the proposed parcel (Locust Hill) have raised concerns that the project is not appropriate for the site. Therefore, the Planning Board recommends rejection of the project application.

Among the reasons why the PB rejected the project application were:

- The proposed site is seriously compromised by the steep slopes that run north to south through the property. The heavily sloped terrain imposes limitations for the siting of buildings and parking areas, safe access onto Rhinecliff Road, and providing useable outdoor recreation space for tenants.
- The site is heavily forested and will require tree cutting and the loss of much of the understory (underbrush or undergrowth) ground covering.
- Using the Wells Manor road as an entrance or egress will create problems since it was not originally designed as a through road which could handle traffic volume beyond that of the senior citizen residents.
- Increased traffic volume using Astor Drive could overwhelm the road's safe carrying capacity and create hazards for residents using the Wells Manor lane to access the Village.
- Any school bus stop for resident children along Rt. 308 would pose a problem to their safety since the speed limit on Rt. 308 is 45 mph.
- Consider ways to make the development more compatible with the Town's character and neighborhood. This might require a reduction in the number of units.

### **Conservation Advisory Board/Waterfront Advisory Committee (CAB/WAC)**

*This project is not in the long-term best interest of the Town.*<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Planning Board Referral Response, July 6, 2022, found at <https://www.rhinebeckny.gov/proposed-locust-hill.html>

<sup>3</sup> CAB/WAC Referral Response, June 30, 2022, found at <https://www.rhinebeckny.gov/proposed-locust-hill.html>

On June 30, 2022, the CAB/WAC submitted its report to the Town Board in opposition to the location of the project.

When conducting the site visit and preparing its report, the CAB/WAC relied upon the policies found in the town's Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP). Rhinebeck's LWRP is a program prepared and adopted by the town government which contains policies on the management of land, water and man-made resources, proposed land uses, and specific projects that are essential to program implementation.

Applying guidelines found in the town's LWRP, the CAB/WAC's findings were:

- The property (Locust Hill) includes Federal and state wetlands.
- The location of the project is within the Scenic Area of Statewide Significance (SASS).

When considering proposed actions that could affect a Scenic Area of Statewide Significance, the agency must consider whether the action would be likely to impair the scenic beauty of the identified resource. Impairment could include, for example, irreversible modification of geologic forms; destruction or removal of vegetation; modification or removal of structures; and addition of structures that would reduce views or diminish the scenic quality of the resource.<sup>4</sup>

The CAB finds that Kearney Developers have in no way used language to convey that they understand the obligation that to build within a SASS District requires special sensitivity to the uniqueness of this site. Discordant (building) materials, such as vinyl fencing and modular block retaining walls will irrevocably spoil the aesthetics of the setting. The style of street lighting, signage, sidewalks, etc., are all treated with the most generic suburban style which is unacceptable to the character of the Estates District, SASS ED-14 Rhinecliff Road Subunit and the neighboring Village Historic District.

- The project area has a mature forest with large black walnut, sugar maples, locust and black cherry trees. The CAB is opposed to the clear cutting of much of the forest (estimated 40 percent) as it will change the gateway viewshed (area) leaving and entering the village via Rhinecliff Road.
- Rhinecliff Road (Rt. 308) and Astor Drive are NYS and town-designated scenic roads.
- The parcel has important history as a site occupied by Native Americans, as well as containing a significant archeological site pertaining to the African American servants of Captain Nathan Darling who occupied the property in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.
- The location of the housing complex and parking areas, including both pervious and impervious areas, would require routine monitoring to protect the Rhinebeck Kill, and other local waterways from herbicides used extensively on lawns and salt used in parking areas which may run off into the local waterways.

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<sup>4</sup> Department of State: Scenic Areas of Statewide Significance, found at <https://dos.ny.gov/scenic-areas-statewide-significance-sass>

- Kearney Group first claimed that no measures would need to be taken to safely use Rhinecliff Road as an entrance. This was contradicted by a subsequent assertion by Kearney that the geological formations along the shoulder of Rhinecliff Road would have to be destroyed to make the proposed entrance safe.
- The CAB does not believe asking Rhinebeck to permanently trade a mature woodland buffer, with its abundance of wildlife habitat and sensitive wetland, for an inappropriately scaled development.

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