

Mr. Sarkis Sarkisian  
Town Planner  
Wayland, MA

May 21, 2020

Dear Mr. Sarkisian:

On behalf of the sellers of the property at 81 West Plain Street, Wayland, MA, we are submitting this letter of support for the proposed subdivision development on that property. The three of us (Mark Harmon, Susan Harmon Stasny, and Janet Harmon) have been managing the sale of this property for the other ten sellers that include the children and grandchildren of Eleanor and Daniel Harmon. By way of additional background, we grew up on the property, are highly familiar with this section of Wayland (i.e., Cochituate), and the many great features this location offers. We also are quite aware of the current condition and the dire need for improvements to the house and on the land. We see the plan proposed by Silver Leaf Homes as the best option to fulfill our parents' wishes, to improve the site, and use it for the maximum benefit for the community. In the following paragraphs we more fully explain each of these points.

Our parents wanted to help each of their children and grandchildren financially. The only way for them to do that was to pass along the property at 81 West Plain Street with the intention to sell upon the death of our mother Eleanor Harmon. Given that it is not possible for all 13 recipients to live on the property and that many live in other states, selling is the only feasible option. Our parents were quite aware that selling would be the only possible outcome that would achieve their wishes and specifically asked us to work together to make sure everyone benefited to the maximum degree possible. It should be noted that the intention to eventually sell the property was even discussed with some of the neighbors as early as 2011.

After our mother's passing in July 2018, the majority of inheritors met after her services to determine the fate of the property. We all agreed that selling the property was the only way forward, but we were open to a number of possible plans including selling it to one of the inheritors if they would pay fair market value. This discussion was relayed to those not able to attend the meeting and after reaching agreement we collectively decided to sell the property by August 2019.

As we prepared to market the property we considered a number of options. The first was to sell to one of the inheritors. None of the inheritors had the capital, interest, or expertise to pursue this option. We considered selling to someone outside the family as a single house site. We considered several plans including those involving abutting neighboring properties. Despite working on this option for many months, we were unable to reach any sort of agreement with the other neighboring landowners. We therefore decided to put the property on the market. We were very happy to find a buyer interested in creating a subdivision that would add value to the neighborhood. The fact that the existing house might be retained for another family to use makes the plan ideal from our perspective.

In the course of pursuing the options outlined above we made our neighbors aware of our plans and in some cases offered them an opportunity to either purchase land or to work together with us in creating a larger subdivision. For example, we contacted the local Catholic parish to see if they would be interested in purchase some of the land to expand their cemetery. They were unable to do so. We offered to sell a portion of the land to one of the other neighbors, but they were not interested. We offered to sell the back area to a conservation group, but again there was no interest. Given the need to increase low income housing in Wayland we considered using the land for low income housing, but we did not have either the expertise or capital to pursue this plan. Thus, despite these efforts to develop alternatives, our only viable option was to sell the property on the open market. Silver Leaf Homes, the buyer, has developed a sensitive, sensible plan that maximizes the value of the land. Additionally, if the existing house is retained, the proposed plan may even achieve part of our wish to create low income housing on the site.

Having lived in this part of town for many decades we realize it has a certain character, but that this character has also continued to change. During our life in Cochituate, open fields and woods near our house were converted to housing. We understand from one perspective this is a loss, but as we visit the neighborhood today we realize this development has lead to a more viable, more vibrant community. We view the currently proposed plan as in keeping with these changes that have been occurring since our parents purchased the property in the 1950's. We recall many conversations with our father, Dan, in which he expressed his desire to purchase and develop lands for housing; and although he was not able to do this, by selling the property for subdivision we would, in a sense, be following his plan. Moreover, we see the subdivision and restoration of the existing house as the best way to increase value for the community and to improve the character of the neighborhood. Frankly, we do not think that the current appearance of either the property or existing house does anything but detract from both the value of the neighbors' property and character of the neighborhood. If it is possible to restore the existing house and improve the landscaping, the proposed plan would greatly improve the appearance at the expense of creating a paved drive where a gravel one now exists. It is likely that this driveway will be upgraded in the future regardless of how the property is used given it is probably one of the few gravel ones still existing along West Plain Street. The creation of two new homes in the back of the lot does mean that the existing woodlot would have to be altered, but the appearance from West Plain Street would not be changed greatly, if at all. We recognize the value of retaining woodland; however, having grown up playing in this woodlot we have to note that it has degraded significantly from that earlier time, with many of the large trees dead or dying; and there is little of value to replace them. In addition, areas that one could safely walk through are now so overgrown with invasive plants and poison ivy that it is now no longer appealing for most to walk (including ourselves). Although generally not used by the public, we recognize that abutters have enjoyed using this property for walks and recreation in the past, but it is not a public park, it is in the end private property. We see the replacement of this degraded woodlot with houses and re-plantings of trees with the potential to reach large size as a vast improvement and a much better use of the land.

From the perspective of costs versus benefits, we believe the proposed project is highly favorable. Specifically, in terms of benefits, the proposed plan will add housing, potentially provide a low income housing site, improve the general appearance, increase tax revenues, and increase the resale value of neighboring properties. This comes at the cost of improving an existing driveway and removing a rarely used, degraded woodlot.

The property has been under pending sale contract since October 2019. We are now reaching the point where some of the inheritors need to receive payment and our ability to provide them cash advances has become limited. While we await the Planning Board's approval, we are paying property taxes and insurance for the house; creating significant costs to the co-owners. Silver Leaf Homes has done their due diligence bringing forth their proposal to the Board, doing site work, surveying, engineering and modifying plans in response to the Board's input. We understand that developing and exploring the various options has taken substantial effort on the part of Silver leaf Homes and the Planning Board. We do appreciate the time required for the Planning Board to make a careful and wise decision regarding the proposed subdivision. The flexibility and responsiveness to suggested changes and improvements by the developers has been quite positive, but all of this takes time. We believe that these discussions and efforts have now lead to a plan that achieves many benefits with minimal costs and that the time to make a decision has been reached. We hope you will support the proposed subdivision and plan.

Sincerely yours,

Mark Harmon  
1865 NW Beca Ave  
Corvallis, OR 97330

Susan Harmon Stasny  
206 Brickett Hill Road  
Pembroke, NH 03275

Janet Harmon  
10 Harold Ave  
Pembroke, NH 03275