

Millbury Planning Board
127 Elm Street

10/25/2021 Planning Board Meeting – 17 Rice Road

When looking at the 2019 Master Plan for the Town of Millbury, the feedback collected from over 970+ of the residents directly aligns with what’s consistently been vocalized during the calls for this project. 17 Rice Road is not building single-family homes and they are attempting to build several multifamily units directly on top of a pristine ecosystem.

The residents of Millbury overwhelmingly support the construction of SINGLE-FAMILY HOMES:

What are the top housing needs in Millbury?

Single family homes on small lots	20%
Single family homes on large lots	19%
Townhouses	17%
Assisted living, extended care and nursing facilities	16%
Garden-style apartments	13%
In-law apartments	10%
Other	7%

The number one concern in one of the poll questions was the “Disappearing wildlife habitat and forests”:

Are you concerned about the following open space/historic resource-related issues in Millbury? (Respondents could select up to 3 choices)

Destruction of the town’s character	13% (277)
Demolition of historic buildings	11% (225)
Disappearing wildlife habitat & forests	21% (427)
Disappearing farmland	12% (248)
Degradation of water bodies & wetlands	16% (319)
Degradation of drinking water supplies	16% (329)
Lack of adequate recreational facilities	10% (208)
Other	1% (19)

The development at 17 Rice Road is not making any effort to “preserve the small town feeling” as noted as one of the “key themes” outlined in the Master Plan (see screenshot below). As cited in my previous letter, using the 2020 Census data, this project is incredibly overbuilt. According to the 2020 Census, Millbury’s population grew by 4.3% (13,261 -> 13,831) from 2010 which only equates to 570 new residents. A conservative estimate of 92 people would move into the proposed 46 units at 17 Rice Road. To emphasize the magnitude of this project, it would be like placing 16% of all individuals who moved into town in the last decade onto this tiny 15.6-acre parcel. Such extreme figures may be acceptable in the city of Worcester but should not be allowed in the town of Millbury. **The density of this project must be lowered.**

Process

In 2016, residents were invited to a town-wide public forum to voice their concerns and desires regarding Millbury’s future. In addition, a visioning session was held with senior citizens at the Senior Center and another with Millbury high school honors students. Business owners in Millbury also received an online survey to complete. Lastly, a website (MySidewalk) was set up to collect comments.

Key Themes from the Community Conversations

- A desire to preserve the small town feeling while revitalizing the downtown. There was some nostalgia over the fact that the downtown used to be more vibrant and included a diner that was affordable and acted as a gathering place.
- An interest in improving transportation and circulation. Methods to achieve this included improving roads, constructing a more thorough sidewalk system, and completing the Blackstone River Bikeway.
- A wider range of housing would support people through various stages of the life cycle. Multi-family housing was especially desired in the downtown, as well as more choices for seniors to age in place and young families to live.
- An appreciation for Millbury’s natural features and historic structures. Residents voiced a desire to preserve and protect natural and historic resources, as well as increase access to them.
- Additional services, programs, and opportunities for the increasing senior population, youth, and the disabled. Concerns voiced included providing affordable housing in an appropriate size and location, adequate school buildings and opportunities for recreation for youth, and additional opportunities for the disabled community.
- A desire for beautification and maintenance of public and private properties, especially in the downtown, but also throughout the Town.



The removal of units 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 must occur to protect the “critical ecosystem” that is the pond. The Master Plan clearly outlines this is an integral component when considering every development project. During the last call, the developer expressed interest in a dialogue with the community. The direct-abutters and respondents to the Master Plan survey are speaking clearly when they continually state that they want crucial ecosystems preserved, please remove the units to align this project with the wishes of the community and the residents of town.

Wetland Protection

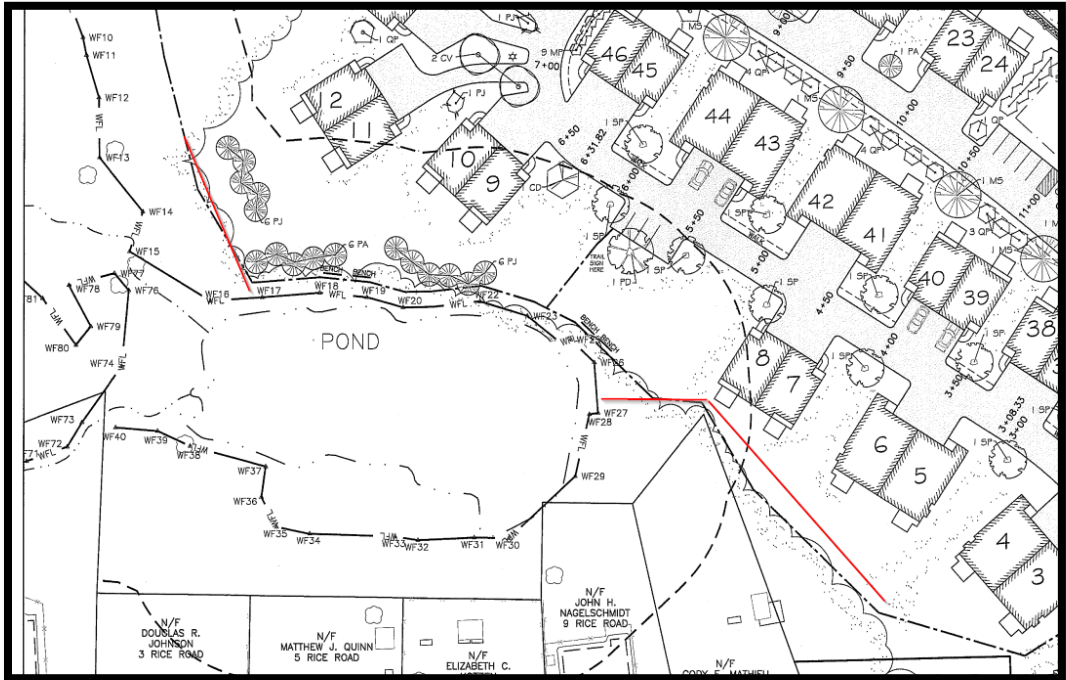
Millbury does not have a Wetland Protection Ordinance; the Conservation Commission reviews projects pursuant to the provisions of the Wetlands Protection Act (WPA), under M.G.L. Chapter 131, and it’s implementing regulations. However, many of the bylaws, rules and regulations highlighted within this section provide additional protection to wetlands, waterways and floodplains in Millbury. A wetland protection bylaw would be beneficial to enhance protection of resource areas such as isolated bodies of water not meeting the isolated land subject to flooding

NATURAL RESOURCES AND OPEN SPACE & RECREATION

ID	Objective / Strategy	Supporting Parties	Timeframe
GOAL: To preserve, maintain and enhance the town’s natural resources, including its parks, conservation areas, waterways, wetlands, and other open spaces.			
NR-1	<p><i>Maintain and protect the town’s natural resources through improved regulatory controls and infrastructure upgrades.</i></p> <p>A. Enhanced Regulatory Controls</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Evaluate, amend, and enforce Zoning Bylaws relative to environmental regulatory controls. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Wetlands Bylaw b) Low-Impact Development c) Energy/Sustainable Development <p>B. Infrastructure Upgrades</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create an implementation plan for catch basin and other stormwater upgrades. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Town Manager - Board of Selectmen - Planning Department - DPW Department - Planning Board - Conservation Commission - Residents 	<p>NR-1(A): Ongoing</p> <p>NR-1(B): Years 1-4</p>

<p>NR-2</p>	<p><i>Protect the integrity of the Town's ecosystem and natural landscapes as development continues in Millbury.</i></p> <p>A. Identify, Inventory, and Update</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Update the comprehensive baseline inventory of all existing natural resources. 2. Identify lands critical to ecological function. 3. Identify stream/habitat continuity upgrades. 4. Identify the most important contributing parcels and make them preservation priorities. 5. Identify possible locations for a town beach. <p>B. Pursue Funding Opportunities</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Complete outreach and education to pursue adoption of Community Preservation Act. 2. Apply for additional MVP/resiliency funding. 3. Apply for additional Green Communities funding. 4. Partner with watershed associations and other environmental groups to seek grants for resource protection. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Town Manager - Board of Selectmen - Planning Department - Planning Board - Conservation Commission - Blackstone Corridor Inc. - Blackstone Chamber of Commerce - Other Conservation Groups - Local Land Trust - Residents - Youth Groups - MA EEA/DCR - Interns
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Every direct-abutter on the South side of the pond has expressed a serious concern regarding the walking path and the potential for trespassing. During the last call, the developer stated he had a “willingness to work with the neighbors”, please exercise this willingness by agreeing to construct a fence to protect the existing residents. A 6-foot-high black fence (red line, screenshot below) would be incredibly effective at deterring the vast majority of would-be trespassers and alleviate the concerns continuously expressed on this call.



We are calling for a **FOURTH** revision of the project proposed at 17 Rice Road. With all the outstanding action items that remain, this project should be very far from seeking any type of approval.

At a minimum, the **FOURTH** revision must remove units 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 to protect the pristine ecosystem that is the pond, and nothing should be placed in their current locations. If the Planning Board will not deny the multifamily special permit as direct-abutters and the majority of Millbury residents expressed in the 2019 Master Plan, then the number of buildings constructed should be lowered to 15 or less. The developer must also show a willingness to protect the existing community by acting to drastically lower the density, remove the units on the pond, and construct a fence to mitigate trespassing.

To the Planning Board, please continue to do everything in your power to protect the existing residents of this community.

Thank you kindly for your continued support.