



WalkBoston

September 11, 2006

Secretary Robert W. Golledge, Jr.
Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, MEPA Office
100 Cambridge Street, Suite 900
Boston, MA 02114

RE: Comments on Osborne Hills, Salem, MA EOE A No. 13865

Dear Mr. Golledge:

WalkBoston appreciates the opportunity to comment on the ENF for the Osborne Hills residential subdivision in Salem, MA. We are commenting because of the departure that this proposal represents in terms of pedestrian activities in low density neighborhoods.

Osborne Hills is unusual in several ways. It is proposed to conserve more than 50% of the land in open space and recreational areas. It has a network of publicly accessible trails for low impact activities. Although the site has numerous wetlands areas and a 250' wide power line easement, the development attempts to skirt such lands and proposes mitigation of wetlands where affected.

Because of the novelty of the concept of integrating pedestrian paths into a subdivision, we offer the following comments.

1. Sidewalks – It is not clear if all of the project's streets will include sidewalks. If one purpose of the trails and open space network is to encourage walking, all of the streets should have sidewalks.
2. Internal path connectivity – One of the goals of this subdivision appears to be that paths should loop out and back to provide maximum use for residents. Many of the proposed paths in Osborne Hills in fact are comprised of loops. A few in the northernmost corner of the proposed development do not connect back into the side. It could be because they connect outside the site but that is not delineated on the material available. At the easternmost corner of the site near Marlborough Road, there are no paths at all. This part of the subdivision is focused on a wetland, and could be connected to a pedestrian network by paths located on lot borderlines or via sidewalks that connect to Marlborough Road.
3. External path connections – It would be interesting to know if external links for paths could be created that would permit greater relationships between subdivisions. One such location is at the end of Barcelona Avenue south of this project which appears to lend itself to a pedestrian connection, even if a vehicular connection were not appropriate.
4. The effects of topography – Part of the site is characterized by sharp changes in grade. These escarpments make for more challenging walking than those on flat parcels. Paths should take advantage of changes in topography where possible.

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5. Walks to school – The paths included in this proposal are not primarily intended to provide access to schools, and nearby schools (if any) are not shown on the project plans. In the next environmental submission, we request that schools be shown, and walking routes to the schools (whether via off-street paths or sidewalks) be shown. If street crossings are required, the proponent should indicate the traffic control measures (stop signs, crosswalks, traffic signal, etc.) that will be provided to ensure children’s safety.
6. Paths at lot edges - The proponent shows several locations where loop paths and connections between paths are laid out along the edges of lots in the subdivision. These paths are located on the east and north sides of the subdivision. Most are located at the rear of lots, but some appear on the side lot boundaries. This rather old-fashioned concept seems worthy of implementation to provide on-site recreational opportunities. We hope that future filings will show these connections as actual rather than “potential.”
7. Paths across wetlands – Because of the extensive wetlands included on the site, there are several locations where paths will have to cross wetlands. We hope a relatively simple means can be found to accomplish these connections, and one whose expense does not preclude going forward.
8. Paths in utility corridors – Many people have proposed using utility corridors as locations for walking paths. To date, few have succeeded. Here the proposed paths crisscross the utility’s easement, which may not be feasible if the corridor is fenced, or if the utility feels very strongly that its easement is not to be used for multiple purposes. It would be interesting to explore the best ways of approaching and working with utility companies on the question of pedestrian access to easements. Apparently the proponent of this project has made initial overtures to the company and received some support for the proposal’s ideas. We hope that the proponent will provide greater detail on this issue in the next filing.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this document. Please feel free to contact us for clarification or additional comments.

Sincerely

Robert Sloane
Senior Planner