Wrentham Boards of Health
Wrentham Conservation Commission
Wrentham Planning Board

July 22, 2022

RE: Sheldon West & Sheldon Meadows projects

Dear Board Members,

Our names are Karl and Wendy Backlund and we've lived in Sheldonville for 30 years (well, Karl has lived here 56 years.) We are concerned about the construction of these projects at 20 Hancock and 1139 West. Our family has been in construction for over 50 years in this area, and, in life experience, building on slabs in New England is risky. The copious amount of fill necessary to build in this area will inevitably result in a shifting and a settling of soils, resulting in expensive repairs for the home owners. I'm writing to inquire about building these homes on slabs, on top of copious amounts of fill, that in the end, will sit on top of a very wet area.

I, Wendy, worked in a building at 10 Plymouth Street in Mansfield. It is approximately 8400 sq ft (some is living space and some is garage) is built on a slab, in a wet area. A large amount of fill was brought in in order to build there. After several years of being there, the building began to "settle" and sink, and in doing so, it tilted to one side. My office drawer wouldn't stay closed, my office door would always slowly close itself, and the office door across the hall from me wouldn't stay open. Trim work separated at the joints. At one point, enough settling had happened that an issue with the pipe from the bathroom out to the sewer pump box arose, making it so that the pipe no longer had the proper pitch allowing it to flow. This caused a serious back up and all the sewerage backed up through the floor drains. It was not good, to say the least. Also, there have been many issues over the years with the plumbing from the kitchen sink also backing up. **The town had to remove the floor tiles, jack hammer up the concrete floor from the bathroom all the way out to the sewer pump box in the driveway in order to get to the pipes and repair the problem**. These repairs were excessively expensive. How can people on a fixed income afford to maintain the vulnerable plumbing of these homes?

Also, at the building on Plymouth Street I worked at, areas of the parking lot and driveway sank in (*no doubt due to the fact they paved over compacted fill on wet land*), leaving large sink holes here and there. In the winter, the water that eventually filled them froze, causing further breakage of the pavement. We all know what it's like in New England driving around or hitting pot holes and how they grow and grow. The entire parking area was uneven and had pot holes, because they paved on top of fill, on top of wet land.

I imagine the street and the driveways of these two projects will suffer the same fate.

In our own home, all of the plumbing pipes that empty into the septic tank are in the basement, easily accessible and protected from shifts and changes in the environment. The septic tank and leaching field is in the yard, wide open, void of trees with large roots that could shift or clog a pipe, and also, never anything heavier than the lawn mower out there. This helps ensure the pipes don't shift.

This is New England. We get frost heaves in the winter, very wet seasons, very dry seasons, on top of very wet and very cold seasons … and buildings settle, and streets break apart. It is not hard to forecast the inevitable here.

I realize my example/experience is only one building that is approximately 8400 sq ft. And yet, that catastrophe happened. The inhabitants weren't running multiple sinks or washing machines, dishwashers, showers and flushing multiple toilets. The applicant's proposal is so much bigger than my experience with one building on a slab in a filled wet area.

Given the risk I outlined above, if there is a catastrophic failure in any of these homes, where will the grey water end up? What will the impact be to the surrounding homes, streams, and aquifer protection districts. Where will the sewage end up?
Will it back up into homeowner's drains, back yards, or in vulnerable streams?

I realize there are incredibly talented and intelligent engineers involved here, but there were also very talented and intelligent engineers involved in the creating the building at 10 Plymouth Street. I don't understand how the applicant can guarantee this type of thing will not happen a few, or even 10, years down the road. They intend to build on slabs, on top of fill, on top of wet land. It just makes so little sense to do this. It appears like the applicant is truly trying to fit a square peg in a round hole, and I cannot see it staying as they envision, worry free, for very long. "Properly engineered" is not a guarantee. What expense will the homeowners incur long after the developer is gone? How might this effect the abutters and the sensitive environment in which the applicant wishes to build? I do not see how they could possibly guarantee there won't be such issues.

We sincerely appreciate your consideration of our thoughts and concerns.

Respectfully,
Karl and Wendy Backlund