



Our view: Wenham project should move forward

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Harborlight Community Partners' proposal for a 60-unit elderly affordable housing project on Maple Street in Wenham cleared a key hurdle recently, earning approval from the town's Zoning Board of Appeals.

The plan has already been approved by the Conservation Commission and the Board of Health, and the Ipswich River Watershed Association says its environmental concerns have been addressed. The project now deserves wider support from selectmen, town residents and anyone concerned about the looming housing crisis facing our parents and our parents' parents.

The Zoning Board of Appeals process, by design, concentrates on narrow aspects of the proposal, including parking, sewerage and other property issues. It is important, however, for residents — including those appealing earlier board decisions — to remember the larger issue.

By 2030, the number of American adults over 50 is expected to reach 132 million, an increase of more than 70 percent since 2000, according to a report from Harvard University's Joint Center for Housing Studies. The fastest-growing subset of that group is those between the ages of 65 and 74. That group is expected to nearly double in size from 21.7 million in 2010 to 38.6 million by 2030. Meanwhile, housing costs take up an increasing proportion of work and retirement income.

It is clear more affordable housing is needed across the region. Harborlight's plan would help meet that burden.

The 60 units — all qualifying as affordable — would be contained in a 35-foot-tall building on 3 1/2 acres of land. Each one-bedroom unit will be affordable. Forty-eight units would rent at \$988 for households with an income below 60 percent of area income, and 12 units would rent at \$529 for households with an income less than 30 percent of area median.

Funding for the project could come from the town's Community Preservation Commission and Housing Trust; that will be decided once the plan clears the permitting process. Hopefully, that will happen soon. This project presents a solid response to a growing problem by a respected community organization. It deserves enthusiastic support.

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