

City of Boulder
Planning and Development Services
P.O. Box 791, Boulder, CO 80306-0791
Attention: Ms. Elaine McLaughlin, Senior Planner

November 29, 2017

Re: The Academy on Mapleton Hill: Safety and Well Being of Future Residents

Dear Ms. McLaughlin:

I am writing to express concern over the design of the proposed project as it relates to the safety and well being of its future residents. It seems a range of decisions have been made to increase the overall density and scale of the project to maximize profit at the expense of careful consideration of the needs of individuals in congregate care. My concerns arise as I compare the design of the current proposal to that of Casa Dorinda, a similar facility in Montecito, California, where my mother lived for the last ten years of her life. The two facilities are similar in price point and size, but their designs demonstrate very different levels of attentiveness to providing for the well being of their elderly residents.

Safety

Casa Dorinda

The vast majority of living units are located in two story buildings scattered throughout the campus. There are approximately 20 independent living units per building, with ten on each floor. Though each building has an elevator to serve the top 10 units, there is a firm policy that only completely ambulatory people are permitted to live on the second floor, so that in the even of fire, electrical failure, or other hazard, residents could exit safely via the stairs. Individuals with canes or walkers are required to live in first floor units so they can exit on their own or be assisted by staff as needed.

The Academy

By contrast, the majority of units in this project are located in much larger buildings on the second and third floors. In the case of the building with 56 units - many with 2 bedrooms - which can imply individuals or couples with greater independence but not necessarily complete mobility – perhaps 80 individuals would have to be evacuated under emergency conditions by means of only two elevators. In the building housing individuals needing greater care, there are 41 units on the 2nd and 3rd floors, and again, two elevators. This plan assumes that the pared down night staff will be able to get everyone out safely and is far from realistic. It seems clear that the project's emphasis has been placed on maximizing the built environment to create more units in bigger buildings while giving less attention to the safety of future residents.

Access to the Outdoors

Casa Dorinda

Every unit, including those in the acute care facility, had a lovely patio or balcony suitable to seat 4 – 6 people comfortably for conversation, cocktails or supper. Many residents had their own gardens with vegetables, flowers and small trees and spent considerable time in these lovely outdoor living spaces. The buildings were oriented to take advantage of southern exposures, and most were sun filled and bright. In addition, there was a lovely gently graded walking path of about a mile around the facility which was used by many residents as part of their daily routine. The paths

between buildings were paved, level, and covered so residents could move easily and safely between buildings during the day or evening.

The Academy

By contrast, the buildings run primarily north to south, meaning few will benefit from a southern exposure. Many of the public seating areas will be in shadow much of the day – including that for the Memory Care unit. Units do have balconies but the majority are well under 100sq. feet, and will be inadequate to encourage outdoor leisure or entertaining. In addition, the site is hilly and steep, with no opportunity for comfortable walking for the less robust, or anyone using a cane or walker. The Sanitas trail cannot be imagined to be of use to most of the Academy residents, and little other accommodation has been provided for outdoor exercise. Sidewalks between buildings are not covered, and in rain or snow, will be extremely difficult to navigate. Again, little attention seems to have been given to the residents' need for outdoor exercise or leisure, both considered to be essential for healthy aging. The developers seemed to have designed this project using rather standard commercial criteria rather than thoroughly engaging the needs of their aging population.

Size and Scale of Units

Casa Dorinda

All units are designed to be on one floor and of modest size and scale. The vast majority of the units were contiguous in the 20 unit buildings described above, with a few one story free standing “casita” bungalows edging the large communal lawn. The one bedroom units were under 800sq ft, and the largest 2 bedroom units were under 1500sq ft. The size, scale and easy proximity were appropriate and manageable for older people interested in simplifying their lives and activities.

The Academy

By comparison, though the units in Buildings A and B maintain a reasonable size, others far exceed what is desired or required for senior housing or congregate care. The large apartments or houses are isolated on the north edge of the property in a perimeter “country club” of units which are not integrate into the community as a whole. Their scale qualify them as luxury housing even by Boulder standards; they are far from any communal facilities and will be difficult or impossible to reach on foot in bad weather.

In conclusion, it seems clear to me that this project is designed primarily for profit – taking advantage of the congregate care density formula, maximizing the number, size and scale of the units, and stretching the rules to build additional detached large stand alone units. Unfortunately, the consequence of these decisions is that the facility will not provide a safe and appropriate environment for elder citizens. There are many models of best practice the developers could have drawn on. I reference only one here, because I came to know it intimately and respect its concern for its residents in every aspect of its design and maintenance. I feel that the current proposal falls far short of this mark, and I hope the staff and Planning Board will evaluate it carefully from the prospective of the safety and well being of its future residents.

Thanks you so much,

Sincerely,

Wendy Baring-Gould
536 Maxwell Avenue