

Scrub-A-Dub Car Wash
171 Pelham Street
2023-26 Special Permit application
2023-27 Variance application
Opposition Letters

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Submitted November 15,2023

I'm a lifelong resident of the West End of Methuen, and I would like to voice my opposition to the proposed car wash at the current Fireside location. I believe zoning variances should be allowed only if the proposed development benefits the community. This car wash will not contribute to the development of the West End. It will not provide any service that we cannot currently get at one of the existing car washes nearby, and it will not draw people in to support other local businesses. Allowing this development will be a blight upon the Pelham St. area that we cannot afford. I urge you to reject the Scrub a Dub proposal.

Thank you,
Caroline Mulligan
26 Perley St.
Methuen, MA

Mr. Matthew D'Agostino

18 October 2023

Chair of the Zoning Board

City of Methuen

Dear Mr. D'Agostino,

I am a lifelong resident of Methuen. My wife and I currently live on Garfield Street less than one mile from the Fireside. During my seventy-eight years, I have watched the slow downward spiral of lower Pelham Street. It has morphed into a tacky mini Route 1. We have fast food joints, a seedy hotel, convenience stores and more. The one truly bright spot has been the Fireside Restaurant and Pub.

Now the Fireside is on the chopping block to make room for a third carwash within about 500 yards. Really? We don't need another car wash. Period. We need a place for the community to gather and celebrate their friendships and sometimes share the trials and tribulations that impact everyone from time to time.

We also need a business that supports good, balanced growth in the West end. One that enhances property values rather than eroding them. We don't need another business run by carpetbaggers who have no vested interest in the community. To me, the need for significant variances just to establish the business indicates a lack of respect for what the people of Methuen have established as the norm for a respective area. Again, if you don't live here you don't have to respect our rules. You also don't have to worry about what happens to other businesses or homes in the area of your proposed business.

It's about time that Methuen stops the deterioration of Pelham Street and rejects wholeheartedly the Scrub A Dub proposal. We should be making every effort to preserve a place for the community to gather, not facilitate the continued decline of the area. We do not need another car wash.

Respectfully,


John and Karen Regan

15 Garfield Street



Dear Methuen Leadership,

I apologize for being unavailable to attend tonight's hearing in person. I would be grateful if the following letter can be read aloud as part of the public comment at the hearing please:

I am Chris Edwards, a business partner in Exordium Opco. Our company is currently undertaking the two large redevelopments projects at 275 Broadway Street and 5 Pleasant Street here in Methuen.

We have long felt that there is a real opportunity to create a desirable live-work-play community in and around Methuen's once vibrant downtown district. For the last 2+ years, we have been working hard and investing heavily to move Methuen's downtown closer to this objective.

The data on this is clear: If a community is able to achieve a true live-work-play ecosystem, that community and the surrounding areas are likely to experience greater than average property valuation increases. This is due to how desirable the live-work-play ecosystem makes the community to outsiders. We firmly believe this outcome is possible here in Methuen.

We are very concerned about the current situation on Pelham Street, where there is a potential for three car washes within 1/10 of a mile on the same road. We expect that recreating something that looks and feels like Route 1 circa 1995 will create an anchor on property valuations for the citizens and property owners of Methuen. Respectfully, it will be difficult to think about Methuen without thinking about the mess on Pelham Street.

We, and all of Methuen's business partners, need to know that Methuen's leadership is aware of, and fully understands this risk. Thank you for your consideration.

Best regards,

Chris Edwards

Dear Members of Methuen's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Advisory Panel,

My name is Julio Fuentes, I am the owner of the carwash Wash Wax and Wheels on Baldwin Street. We are a minority owned and run business. I am writing to request an immediate meeting with your group, as the proposed Zoning Board hearing on this matter is next Wednesday.

I would like to discuss the potential for significantly negative outcomes for my business and for many other small minority owned businesses in this predominately lower income minority community.

The attached document is a draft and is confidential for the time-being please. It provides a deeper dive into the 3 mile radius around the proposed site. The data strongly suggested the negative impacts of increased competition in this already oversaturated micro market will be mostly felt by small minority businesses, increasing the likelihood of continued community deterioration in this submarket.

We have additional supporting data that speaks to this matter which we will share via the City's online process prior to the hearing.

Please let me know when we might be able to meet or chat.

Thank you for the consideration.

Best,

Julio Fuentes, CFA

I am a Methuen resident at 28 Thayer St. I am writing to voice my opposition to the Special Permit for a car wash at 171 Pelham St.

Methuen does not need another Car wash and the property should be looked at for what potential for the future it will bring.

Understanding the current owners want to retire and sell the property, this choice would not benefit the community or its residents. It has been a long standing family restaurant for many years and many would prefer that type of business be the replacement.

I also believe there would be many traffic issues causing increased congestion at this intersection which already struggles to move smoothly and safely.

I hope this is the right email address for this to reach the zoning board as mentioned at the Nov.15 meeting.

Concerned citizen,

Debbie Raimondo

Good Afternoon,

I am writing to you about the proposed car wash on the site of the current Fireside Restaurant. I have been a resident of Methuen since 2001 and live off of Cross Street on Milan Road.

I am completely against another car wash being built on the Fireside lot. The intersection of Cross Street and Pelham Street is already a high traffic area and dangerous. I have witnessed many accidents due to people not yielding to traffic.

The traffic backs up on Cross Street already and if there is an accident on 93 south, Pelham Street becomes backed up too. Having cars constantly coming in and out of the car wash will cause even more backups. I already have trouble getting out of the Irving station located less than a tenth of a mile down the road due to the amount of cars.

The fact that there are 2 car washes within a few tenths of a mile makes no sense. I rarely see cars going to those car washes, why would we possibly need another?

I have yet to talk to or read online of any Methuen resident in favor of this project. And with the recent closing of the Outback, the closing of the Fireside will leave even less dining options on the West side of Methuen. I'm sure there are other restaurants that would be interested in occupying the site.

The Fireside is a place of community. I always see neighbors and friends on my visits. It would be a shame to lose that. I really hope the city listens to the people and makes a decision to ban the car wash.

Regards,

Lynne Putnam
11 Milan Road

Good Morning,

I am writing to you today about the proposed Scrub-a-Dub car wash at the intersection of Pelham and Cross Streets. I was unable to attend Wednesday night's meeting due to my work schedule. I watched the video of the meeting and every resident who spoke shared my same concerns regarding a 3rd car wash within 1,000 ft to be allowed to operate on Pelham Street.

I would like to add to the conversation that Massachusetts General Law Chapter 40A must be followed in granting a zoning variance. As you all know, zoning laws are put in place to protect the community. To be granted a variance, the Zoning Board must specifically note in their decision that:

...owing to circumstances relating to the soil conditions, shape, or topography of such land or structures and especially affecting such land or structures but not affecting generally the zoning district in which it is located, a literal enforcement of the provisions of the ordinance or by-law would involve substantial hardship, financial or otherwise, to the petitioner or appellant, and that desirable relief may be granted without substantial detriment to the public good and without nullifying or substantially derogating from the intent or purpose of such ordinance or by-law.

In this case, adhering to the zoning bylaw would not be a substantial hardship to the property owner or the applicant as defined by Massachusetts General Law Chapter 40A, Section 10. The application before you is requesting a variance to just about double the allowable coverage (35% allowed, 65% requested) on the lot and to provide for a 0 foot setback (25 ft required) from Cross Street for a canopy. Granting these variances will overpower the lot. Wanting to build a larger car wash than allowed per zoning is not a hardship in any way. As the residents who have attended your meeting and sent in letters and emails have already stated, granting the zoning relief will cause substantial detriment to the public good as well as the character of the neighborhood (ie traffic, safety, property values) . The location is the gateway to West Methuen. Granting these variances will nullify and substantially derogate from the intent and purpose of Methuen's Zoning Bylaw.

The current owners have chosen to take the highest offer for their property, which is understandable when people are retiring and want to ensure their future financial stability. There are however a number of other uses for the property that would not require the zoning relief that was put in place to protect the community.

Thank you for your service to the community and the attention to both my concerns, the concerns of the wider community and to Massachusetts law.

Best Regards,

Kathryn Forina

14 Perley Street

Dear ZBA Chairman D'Agostino:

As a Methuen resident for 45 years, many of which were in the spacious West End, I am respectfully opposing the siting of a Scrub a Dub car wash facility at the current Fireside Restaurant site. That immediate vicinity at Cross Street and Pelham Street is already saturated with nearby car wash entities. The intersection in question has historically exhibited a documented bottleneck of traffic. In fact, it is well-known that the area has long served as a viable shortcut for New Hampshire residents seeking to avoid Route 28 traffic.

On many weekday mornings, it is not uncommon to experience a discernible vehicle backup stretching back to the Marsh Grammar School on Pelham Street and a significant impasse on Cross Street.

Has the company even offered a mitigation plan to the community, because I haven't read anything in the local papers? It would cost hundreds of thousands of dollars to accomplish any meaningful mitigation, if not more. And merely allowing for better ingress or egress into the site does not constitute infrastructure improvement in my book.

Methuen already has car wash venues on Haverhill Street (off of Route 93), Pelham Street and the Valley (off of Route 213). Why add more? Sadly, we have a hotel riddled with code violations, a vacant Outback Steakhouse site and a Fireside Restaurant site that could be easily converted into a new eatery, perhaps a breakfast and lunch venue.

Do we want Methuen to be known as a destination community, or a convenience community for commuters only interested in traveling off the highway, filling up their tanks, washing their cars, and grabbing a quick McDonald's breakfast on the run. That unwelcomed scenario reminds me of rest areas in New Jersey and other states. There is so much potential in the Pelham Street/ Cross Street area, but we are currently wasting away our options. There must be better amenities that we, as Methuen residents, can collectively endorse. Scrub a Dub is simply not that solution and will exacerbate the infrastructure and economic deficiencies in that potential gem.

Thank you for your public service, and for reading this letter of opposition.

Best regards,

Ken Willette

10 Burnham Road, Apt. 506A, Methuen, MA 01844

To whom it may concern

I would like to go on the record at tonight's meeting to say that I am completely against ANOTHER car wash being approved in the Pelham st are of Methuen on the fireside property. I am a life long resident of methuen of over 50 + years . Methuen use to have a nice home town feel kids use to ride their bikes and there were woods and farms - sadly now Methuen is right up there with bigger city - Medford, Malden Lawrence - traffic is horrible, time is terrible and I have never seen a line at any of the other car washes on that road - I request be that the zoning comity rejects this request Michelle mccormack
16 Merrill st
Methuen ma

Dear Members of the ZBA,

As a concerned Methuen resident for more than 30 years, I have a question regarding the Scrub-A-Dub car wash proposal that I am hoping you can answer. I am opposed to this project for a variety of reasons not the least of which is concern for the existing car washes that are already very close nearby with another similar facility being built on Broadway. I fail to see how the surrounding population is adequate to support another facility of the same type.

My question relates specifically to the request for a Variance regarding Maximum Lot Coverage. How often has the ZBA granted variances for projects where the lot coverage greatly exceeds the ZBA's max amount of 35%? The proposed car wash will cover 65% of the lot which is almost twice the allowed maximum. I hope you can tell me what the precedent is for such a request.

Sincerely,

MarySusan Santone

384 Pelham St.

Methuen, MA

****** Good afternoon,

Please find attached a letter concerning the zoning applications for 171 Pelham Street. Please share with the Zoning Board.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Regards,

Gordon

Gordon T. Glass, Esq. (ME, MA)

Johnson & Borenstein, LLC

****attachment/report provided to ZBA members on 10/23/23**

Good Afternoon Chairperson D'Agostino,

We are Rob Christy, Dan Talbot and Julio Fuentes. We are the owners currently doing the brand new renovations and conversion of the old Masonic Lodge on Broadway and of the 5 Pleasant Street property. We are also actively pursuing other properties in the area in an effort to continue the rebirth of Methuen's downtown area. Additionally, we also own the car wash at 2 Baldwin St. in Methuen. We have been operating the car wash in Methuen since 2017. We are writing this letter in strong opposition to the possibility of another car wash permit being issued at 171 Pelham Street in Methuen.

When we heard about a possible 4th car wash within 4 exits (1 every exit) in Methuen, we immediately reached out to Jack Wilson and his office for more information as many red flags were raised.

After reviewing the info on zoning Jack sent us, we focused in on the Market Demand criteria.

This is a real issue/concern for Methuen now and in the future, especially given that Methuen has centrally zoned its carwash permissible zones. We thought it would be helpful to provide Methuen's leadership with some carwash industry perspective. Additionally, we point out other considerations and concerns that Methuen's Leadership **should** consider when permitting this type of business. We are happy to discuss in more detail if you or anyone else would like to do so.

Generally speaking, a carwash succeeds when:

- Surrounding population is large enough to support a carwash- **about 30k people per carwash**
- **RULE OF THUMB- a community can support 1 carwash every 3-mile radius**
- Surrounding population has some discretionary income
- **The operator provides a good quality carwash at reasonable prices**
- Towns and cities can support more than 1 carwash BUT certain factors must be present:
 - The population must be significant (about 25-30k people per carwash, so 60k for 2, 90k for 3 carwashes, etc., etc.)
 - **AND** ideally, the carwashes are spaced out with the 3-mile radius rule of thumb in mind

Following the general guidelines above would allow for a community to provide their constituents with this necessary utility which is what it is in places like New England with all of its' winter sand and salt, **without exposing the community to the very serious and costly mistakes of overbuilding and over supplying certain markets.**

The current state of car wash access in Methuen:

- There are currently several carwashes in the Methuen area including:
 - Wash, Wax and Wheels Car Wash – 2 Baldwin Street
 - Merrimac Laundromat and Car Wash – 21 Burnham Rd
 - Circle K Car Wash – 181 Pelham Rd
 - Haffner's Gentle Touch Car Wash – 96 Pleasant Valley St
 - Washville Car Wash – Broadway St
 - Please see the map below for a visual of the current competitors in the Methuen market
- There are two car washes currently operating directly to the left and to the right of the proposed location (Circle K and Wash, Wax and Wheels). There is zero justification for a 3rd carwash here.

- There is currently a car wash being constructed on Rt 28 in Methuen 0.8 miles from the proposed location. This is going to be a tunnel car wash, very similar to what is being considered at the 171 Pelham location. This wash on Rt 28 is expected to be operational November 2023

Some of the concerns raised by carwash over supply and location concentration:

- Carwashes are real estate related businesses which are typically located in marquee, high traffic, commercial areas... **always lots of eyeballs on these types of properties**
- Carwashes require very unique equipment and a very unique building. This expensive equipment and expensive building have **ZERO alternative use...** the land does.
- If too many (even) good operators are forced or allowed to operate without adequate market demand, either due to lack of population or over concentration of capable carwash operators in a small area, then a community can expect that one or more of the operators (despite being “good” operators) will **begin to lose profitability which will lead to less investment in the business and the property** (the quality of the property is part of the carwash business), which will lead to even less profitability, etc., etc. with the end result being the failure of what was otherwise a well-run business before the pie was divided by too many operators... **this dynamic creates all sorts of explicit and implicit costs to the community:**
 - The carwash properties slowly start to be an eyesore
 - As the carwash properties become an eyesore more neighbors complain **due to its effects on their businesses**
 - As the carwash properties become an eyesore more neighbors complain **due to its effects on their property values**
 - Giving the use, **lots of expensive environmental and soil testing** must be done to transition the use of this failed business to the next owner and use
 - **Clean-up is very expensive.** Given the unique equipment and building there are no alternative uses. This demolition and clean-up increase the cost to transition the property to the next owner and use. This is not simply re-leasing fungible retail space in a strip mall... **this is far more complicated and expensive**
 - Additionally, due to the high competition in that specific area, **seasoned carwash operators will have little to no interest** in expanding into that market via that dying property.
 - For the reasons above, these tired, dying eyesores **typically take years to transition to new use and ownership...** meanwhile, the entire community suffers from what is an avoidable situation.
- Additional Factors to consider:
 - Having multiple carwashes in close proximity doesn’t increase overall carwash sales. You might buy 2 t-shirts from 2 different stores today but you are not getting your car washed twice in 1 day from carwashes across the street from one another. **The carwashes SPLIT the community’s business... they don’t grow it! Over permitting them is a real risk to ALL operators and the community.**
 - In New England about 50% of carwash sales occur on the weekend, when people are doing other chores. If all carwashes in a community are on the same road there could **be very real traffic issues on the weekend.**
 - Unsubstantiated supply growth will destroy the economic values (net wealth’s) of existing good operators, many of whom have been valued contributing members of Methuen for years. **For a good operator, the value of the carwash business is worth far more than the value of the underlying real estate. It is this value that gets destroyed with over permitting.**

- Over permitting carwashes in a small geographic location could also **unnecessarily tax a city's sewer and water systems in those areas.**

Chairperson D'Agostino, we would appreciate the opportunity to further discuss this issue with you in person at your earliest convenience.

Thank you,

Dan Talbot
Rob Christy
Julio Fuentes, CFA



