

Redlands & Manthorne & Willow Neighborhood Alliance

c/o: Michael Shearns

12 Manthorne Road, West Roxbury, MA 02132

June 27, 2025

Administrative Office of the Board of Appeal

1010 Massachusetts Avenue, Fourth Floor

Boston, MA 02118

RE: 5 Redlands Road, West Roxbury, MA 02132 | ISD Application #ALT1724903

To the Members of the Boston Zoning Board of Appeals,

We are writing about our concerns as neighbors of 5 Redlands Road which is currently being proposed before the Board as a family homeless shelter. Homeless is an urgent and pressing crisis across Boston and struggling families need help. However, after a thorough review of the proposed shelter, it is our firm belief that using 5 Redlands Road for this use fails both the community and the families seeking shelter. We respectfully urge the Board to reject permitting 5 Redlands Road for use as a shelter.

1. Not Designed or Permitted for This Use

The building at 5 Redlands Road was previously a nursing home and is not designed for high-density family living. Converting it to house up to 50 families—potentially over 150 individuals, nearly doubling the population among the abutting streets—raises serious concerns about code compliance, safety, and long-term habitability. This represents a significant change of use, requiring full public oversight and accountability.

The proposed Emergency Assistance (EA) Family Shelter, is to be operated by Making Opportunity Count, Inc. (MOC) and must comply with the Massachusetts Emergency Assistance (EA) program, which operates under the Executive Office of housing and Livable Communities. To qualify for Emergency Assistance (EA) shelter in Massachusetts, families must be experiencing homelessness, have a child under 21 (or be pregnant), meet income and asset limits, and lack feasible alternative housing. Further, it is explicitly defined as 'temporary emergency housing' in both state statute and EOHLC guidance. This definition distinguishes it from permanent residential or institutional uses.

The site lies within a Neighborhood Shopping (NS) subdistrict of the West Roxbury Neighborhood District under Article 56 of the Boston Zoning Code. According to Article 56, Table B, “Homeless shelter” and “Transitional housing” are Conditional Uses, requiring approval through a conditional use permit. No such permit has been sought nor issued for the proposed facility, which violates the procedural and substantive requirements of Boston zoning law.

2. Street Unsuitable & Limited Parking

Redlands Road is a narrow, one-way uphill residential street with extremely limited parking and tight turning access. This infrastructure is not suitable for the increased traffic, service vehicles, and staff required to support a facility of this scale. Overflow parking will burden residents and pose safety issues for pedestrians and emergency responders. The proposed shelter would house more than 150 individuals—more than the total number of residents currently living on the entire street. This drastic increase in population density on a single block will fundamentally alter the character of the neighborhood and strain its infrastructure.

3. Health & Sanitation Risks

When this site operated as a nursing home, there were frequent issues with trash management, rodent infestations, and outdoor smoking. The current plan includes 50 families sharing a few residential kitchen stoves around the clock. This poses serious fire hazards, ventilation challenges, and sanitation concerns—especially without commercial-grade infrastructure.

4. Insufficient Resources for Child Well-being

With a large expected population of children, access to resources to support these children is a critical resource. The site itself fails to provide adequate access to parks or green spaces, leaving children without safe outdoor areas. Local organizations such as the West Roxbury YMCA, Roche Family Community Center, and area private child care institutions lack the space, capacity, and staff to adequately scale to support the expected large increase in young people. These community resources are already at maximum capacity, and the scope does not exist to rapidly increase the supply of caregivers that would be needed to support working poor families.

5. Pedestrian Safety across Centre Street

Centre Street is the heart of the commercial district of West Roxbury. 5 Redlands Road is only a few steps from Center Street, which has been identified by both the City of Boston and MassDOT

as a high-crash pedestrian corridor. The City-led 'road diet' studies found frequent accidents, poor crosswalk visibility, and unsafe traffic speeds (City of Boston Centre Street Safety Project, 2019; MassDOT Vision Zero Crash Data). The lack of crosswalks and the many blind spots around the building create an environment that is not appropriate for a high concentration of families with young children.

6. Negative Impact on Boston Middle Class Families

Middle class families represent the backbone of community organizations and schools in the City of Boston. The middle-class residents of the abutting streets have been long-time home owners whose largest financial investments are their homes. Decisions that impact the values of their homes can have lasting impacts on their abilities to provide education for their children, a safety net for their elderly family, and their long-term financial security. A decision to make 5 Redlands Road a family shelter would produce a deleterious impact to that very financial security.

Studies have shown that homes located near large congregate shelters can experience economic obsolescence, particularly in low-density residential neighborhoods. A 2021 study by sociologists Matthew Desmond and Nathan Wilmers found that homes located within 500 feet of a homeless shelter experienced price reductions of 7% to 12%. See Matthew Desmond & Nathan Wilmers, *Do Homeless Shelters Affect Property Values? Evidence from Massachusetts and California*, Univ. of Wis.–Madison (2021). Similarly, a 2019 analysis by the University of Southern California found that properties near new shelter sites in Los Angeles—particularly in neighborhoods unaccustomed to such facilities—suffered significant declines in value. See USC Price Sch. of Pub. Pol’y, *Impact of Homeless Shelters on Residential Property Values in Los Angeles* (2019).

Locating a high-density shelter at 5 Redlands Road will likely produce similar long-term financial consequences for area homeowners—many of whom are middle-class families who have invested deeply in this stable residential community.

7. No Due Diligence and Questionable Construction Practices

There has been no transparent vetting of the site’s functionality or its overall suitability. Critical issues—such as fire safety, staffing levels, and supervision protocols—remain unresolved, with shifting and inconsistent explanations. These omissions were a major concern raised by residents

during the June 25, 2025 Abutters’ Meeting, where community opposition was strong and unified.

Meanwhile, construction at the site has continued at a rapid and unrelenting pace—reportedly beginning before permits were issued and continuing even after the Boston Inspectional Services Department (ISD) formally denied the long-form building permit (Application #ALT1724903) on June 6, 2025. Despite this refusal, interior and exterior construction, as well as furniture delivery and staging, has proceeded without interruption.

8. Security Risks at Congregate Shelter Sites

According to a 2025 statewide shelter security assessment led by former Boston Police Commissioner Ed Davis, there has been a 788% increase in serious incidents in family shelters across Massachusetts. Congregate sites experienced the highest number of safety threats. Less than half of these sites have on-site security, and many lack trained staff or clear incident protocols. Additionally, shared living spaces in congregate facilities were cited as a major driver of disputes and safety risks. Without professional security, adequate supervision, or site-specific safety plans, placing 50 families in this building—on a narrow street with no buffer—introduces serious and avoidable risks to both residents and the surrounding neighborhood. (EDC – Ed Davis & Associates, 'Security Assessment of Family Shelters', March 2025.)

Without an adequate security plan that properly reflects the sizable population increase in place, the 5 Redlands Road Shelter poses risks to both residents and the surrounding neighborhood.

Conclusion

Given the above concerns, we respectfully request that the Zoning Board of Appeals deny approval for the proposed shelter at 5 Redlands Road. We believe this decision will protect the long-term health, safety, and cohesion of the community.

Sincerely,

The undersigned concerned residents of West Roxbury

SIGNATURE	NAME	ADDRESS	EMAIL/PHONE
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