



Mayor Gary Bassett and the Trustees of the Village Board
Village of Rhinebeck
76 East Market Street
Rhinebeck, NY 12572

January 16, 2024

Dear Mayor Bassett and Trustees of the Village Board:

I am a resident of South Street in the Village of Rhinebeck. As such, I have been following the development of the proposed project for 6 Mulberry St. I am writing regarding this project as both a neighbor and a design professional.

First, I would like to provide a little background on myself, which may qualify me to make certain comments and/or recommendations. I own and manage an international interior design firm in New York City, dash design, which was founded more than twenty years ago. Our work crosses typologies and includes multi-family residential buildings, hotels, and senior living communities. While our focus is on the interior architectural design of these buildings, I have been responsible for leading the exterior design of many of my projects, including some landmarked/historic structures around the country. I hold a master's degree in architecture from the University of Pennsylvania and an engineering degree from Tufts University.

I have reviewed the documents for the Bulkeley School re-design that are uploaded on the Village website entitled "main building plan dated 9/13/23." These documents include proposed plans and elevations of the school building/apartments. I have taken the liberty to make some suggestions to help enhance the design and allow the building to sit more comfortably in the context of our residential and historic neighborhood. Please see the document attached entitled "6 Mulberry St façade and plan study_Ashen_06152024," attached.

Please note the following:

- As proposed, the building design does not have a "front" façade that addresses Mulberry St. I would suggest that this is in direct contrast to the character of the village and a disadvantage for the future residents of the apartment building. Page 3 of my document is an artistic rendering of what the school building might look like with a central entrance, porch, and canopy. My design is not a radical adjustment to the architecture of the school, nor is it a costly solution. What it does provide is a "front" to the street as well as easy access for the residents to enter and exit the building, therefore, allowing them to interact with their neighbors and the village more easily. As we know, one of the joys of living in Rhinebeck is the ability to walk to town. The proposed design by the developer is a suburban solution with the main entrance on the back and focus on the "car," while turning its back to the village. Additionally, adding a front entrance and small porch, better integrates the school building into the historic residential neighborhood. The charm of the houses in the Village comes from details like a front porch and most residences in the Village, including my own, have a front facing door and porch.
- Page 4 is a version of the building with a "whitewash" to the brick.
- In both versions, I have taken the liberty of elongating the second-floor window over the proposed front entrance, in order to place more importance on the central front entry point.
- Page 5 is the existing ground floor plan. The current plan proposes an unpleasant entry sequence from the back through a long hall, past storage lockers. The plan also has an odd mix of apartment types. Of the nine units, eight are two-bedroom units and only one is a one-bedroom. A big issue in the Village is the availability of housing for folks who are either starting

out or scaling back. A better mix of units might be more beneficial. Additionally, I do believe that to adhere to ADA requirements, since there is a non-accessible one bedroom in the basement, the developer would have to put an accessible one-bedroom unit on the ground floor. ADA requires equal treatment for all residents, so you cannot offer an apartment “type” that is not available for a disabled person.

- Page 6 is a revised plan which I created. It shows a new entrance on Mulberry St. To do this, I changed the two front apartment units to one-bedroom units. By cutting 3 ft out of each of the two street-facing apartments, a generous 6 ft front entry hall can be created, which would provide a better experience for the residents, with a direct connection to the street. My sketch shows two 1.5 bath, one-bedroom units with large kitchens and living rooms. I would argue that these changes would enhance the building's value for the owner.

I have one other comment on the proposed development plan. I noticed that in addition to the 9-unit apartment building, there are four single-family houses planned for the property. This plan provides little or no green space for the apartment building. In my experience as a designer of multi-family housing and an investor in real estate myself, added amenities like outdoor space, gardens, and common spaces enhance owner's value. The developer might consider using a portion of the lot at the corner of South and Mulberry as a green space and enlarge lot #4 for a little larger house. The net return might be similar (the average sale price of new construction for luxury homes is running at \$1,000 per square foot in Rhinebeck—this is data from colleagues who are developing several houses in the area).

I would be happy to walk the Board through my concepts and hope I am not too presumptuous to make these suggestions. I am just genuinely concerned about the impact of this project and feel it is important to share ideas to help ensure that it is a successful project for all.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'DAVID ASHEN', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

David Ashen
President, dash design
Resident of 54 South St, Rhinebeck, NY