

Hingham Planning Board
Town of Hingham
210 Central Street
Hingham, MA 02043

Re: 22 Howe Street – Site Plan Review Request for Comprehensive Assessment of Tree Removal, Drainage, Wind and Canopy Impacts

Dear Members of the Planning Board:

We are the owners of 26 Howe Street, directly abutting 22 Howe Street. We are writing regarding the pending Site Plan Review for 22 Howe Street and the extensive clearing of mature vegetation that occurred before the Planning Board completed its review of the current proposal.

We are not opposed to our new neighbors improving their property, and we appreciate their submission of a landscape plan intended to address some effects of the clearing. However, the vegetation removal fundamentally changed the environmental condition of the property, and the current landscape plan does not establish that the functions of the former mature vegetation will be adequately replaced.

We therefore respectfully ask the Planning Board to defer approval of the proposed landscape and site plan until the applicant provides an independent professional assessment of the impacts of the clearing and demonstrates that the proposed mitigation adequately addresses them.

1. The pre-clearing condition should be the appropriate baseline

The photographs we are submitting show the property immediately before and after the clearing.

Exhibit A – Pre-Clearing Condition shows a substantial, continuous mature tree canopy along the boundary between 22 Howe and neighboring properties, including large mature trees, smaller trees, and understory vegetation. Post-Clearing Condition shows the removal of the mature canopy and much of the boundary vegetation, leaving the property substantially exposed.

This is not simply a change in landscaping aesthetics. The former vegetation provided:

- Rainfall interception
- Evapotranspiration
- Infiltration and soil stabilization
- Reduction and slowing of surface runoff
- Shade and cooling
- Wind buffering
- Visual screening and privacy
- Wildlife habitat
- A continuous vegetative buffer between neighboring properties

The Hingham Zoning By-Law addresses preservation of natural site features, natural drainage patterns, existing vegetation, perimeter trees, and vegetation contiguous with adjacent properties. It also requires consideration of groundwater, runoff, flooding, and impacts on neighboring properties.

We therefore respectfully request that the Board use the reasonably documented condition immediately before the clearing—not the already-cleared condition—as the baseline for determining whether the proposed project and mitigation measures satisfy the intent and requirements of Site Plan Review.

2. The Tree Protection and Mitigation Plan should fully account for the trees that were removed

The current zoning provisions require a Tree Protection and Mitigation Plan for Protected Trees. That plan must account for Protected Trees, including Significant Trees, removed within twelve months before the zoning application.

We respectfully request that the Board require the applicant to provide a complete and corrected tree inventory accounting for the vegetation that existed immediately before the clearing, including:

1. All Protected Trees removed during the applicable period;
2. All Significant Trees removed;
3. The DBH/caliper of those trees, to the extent reasonably determinable;
4. Species and approximate height;
5. The approximate location of each removed tree;
6. The corresponding replacement-tree calculation required under the zoning bylaw; and
7. The proposed location, species, caliper, and planting schedule for all replacement trees.

Because some of this information may need to be reconstructed after the fact, we believe an independent professional assessment is appropriate.

3. Replacement tree numbers alone do not demonstrate replacement of the former environmental functions

The July 16 Landscape Plan proposes replacement plantings, but newly planted trees cannot immediately provide the canopy, root structure, rainfall interception, evapotranspiration, or wind protection provided by mature trees.

We ask that the applicant's landscape professional compare:

- (a) The approximate canopy and functional vegetation that existed immediately before clearing; and
- (b) The canopy and functional vegetation provided by the proposed plantings at installation and at reasonable future intervals.

A newly planted three-inch-caliper tree may satisfy a minimum planting requirement, but it does not provide the same environmental function as a mature overstory tree. We therefore ask the Board to require the

applicant to address this maturity gap rather than evaluating mitigation solely by tree count or initial caliper. Where the proposed plantings do not adequately replace the lost canopy and vegetative functions, the applicant should provide additional mitigation through larger replacement trees, additional trees, native vegetation, or other appropriate measures.

4. Please require an independent assessment of drainage, runoff and groundwater impacts

The mature canopy and root systems were part of the site's existing hydrologic system. The Hingham Zoning By-Law requires measures to minimize erosion and sedimentation, prevent changes in groundwater levels, prevent increased runoff and potential flooding, and minimize adverse impacts to neighboring properties from excessive runoff.

We ask that the Town's peer reviewer and/or an independent qualified professional evaluate the effect of losing the pre-clearing vegetation, not simply the incremental runoff associated with the proposed new hardscape. The analysis should compare pre-clearing and proposed conditions and address:

- Rainfall interception
- Infiltration
- Evapotranspiration
- Surface runoff volume and velocity
- Drainage patterns toward abutting properties
- Soil infiltration characteristics
- Seasonal groundwater/water-table conditions
- Potential for ponding or increased saturation
- Erosion and sediment movement
- Whether the proposed stormwater system adequately compensates for the loss of the former vegetated condition

We are not asserting that the clearing has caused a particular drainage problem at 26 Howe. We are asking for the professional analysis necessary to determine whether it has altered drainage or groundwater conditions in a way that could affect neighboring properties.

5. Please evaluate the loss of the former wind buffer

The clearing substantially removed the mature tree canopy that served as a windbreak between 22 Howe and surrounding properties. We ask that the applicant's landscape professional evaluate whether—and when—the proposed plantings will provide comparable wind buffering. If they will not provide adequate protection for many years, the Board should require additional or larger plantings in appropriate locations during the interim.

6. The proposed landscape plan should restore a meaningful property-boundary buffer

The zoning provisions give particular importance to trees at the site perimeter and vegetation contiguous with adjacent properties. We therefore ask the Board to require the applicant to demonstrate that the final landscape plan will restore a meaningful perimeter vegetative buffer, including appropriate overstory, understory, and native plantings where practical. The goal should be to restore the buffer function along the property line, not simply to place the required number of individual trees somewhere on the lot.

7. If the impacts cannot be adequately mitigated on 22 Howe, the applicant should bear the cost of appropriate mitigation

If the professional assessment establishes that the effects of the clearing cannot reasonably be mitigated entirely on the 22 Howe property, we respectfully ask the Board to require appropriate applicant-funded mitigation to the extent permitted by its authority.

We recognize that the Board's authority to require payments directly to private homeowners may be limited. If so, we ask the Board to use any available lawful mechanism to require applicant-funded mitigation, professional review, or other measures addressing demonstrated off-site impacts rather than transferring those costs to abutting homeowners.

8. The proposed shed needs additional information

We also have concerns regarding the proposed 15' × 21' accessory shed. The materials currently available to us do not adequately communicate its:

- Overall height
- Roof height and configuration
- Exterior materials
- Color
- Windows and doors
- Lighting
- Finished grade
- Screening
- Precise relationship to the property line and 26 Howe Street

We respectfully ask that the applicant provide a complete elevation or rendering of the shed, including its actual height, roofline, exterior materials, colors, and accurately dimensioned setbacks from the property lines.

We also ask the Board to confirm that the shed complies with all applicable Residence A setback and dimensional requirements. If it does not, the applicant should obtain any additional zoning relief legally required before the structure is approved.

9. The Board should consider the cumulative effect of the proposed improvements

The tree removal should be considered together with the proposed 35' × 60' sports court, driveway, shed, lawn, landscaping, and other hardscape improvements identified in the current application. The Planning Board should evaluate the cumulative effect of these changes on neighboring properties, including drainage, groundwater, wind exposure, canopy, privacy, noise, and visual impact.

Requested Action

For these reasons, we respectfully ask the Planning Board to defer final Site Plan Approval until the following matters have been addressed:

1. Complete the Tree Protection and Mitigation Plan to account for all Protected and Significant Trees removed within the applicable period before the application.
2. Establish the pre-clearing condition as the baseline for evaluating the environmental effects of the project.
3. Require an independent professional assessment of the loss of mature vegetation and its effects on canopy, drainage, stormwater, groundwater, wind buffering, and abutting properties.
4. Require the applicant to demonstrate that the proposed landscaping provides adequate functional mitigation—not merely the minimum number of replacement trees—and add larger trees, additional trees, and/or native vegetation where necessary.
5. Require the applicant to demonstrate that the proposed stormwater system adequately addresses the loss of the former vegetation as well as the proposed hardscape and grading.
6. If material impacts cannot reasonably be mitigated on 22 Howe, require appropriate applicant-funded mitigation to the extent legally permissible.
7. Require complete height, elevation, appearance, and setback information for the proposed shed before it is approved.
8. Incorporate all required tree, drainage, landscape, and mitigation measures into the final Site Plan Approval as enforceable conditions.

The photographs demonstrate the substantial difference between the pre-clearing and post-clearing conditions. We respectfully ask the Board to ensure that the consequences of the clearing are fully evaluated and that the applicant remains responsible for appropriate mitigation.

Thank you for your consideration and for your work in reviewing this application.

Respectfully,

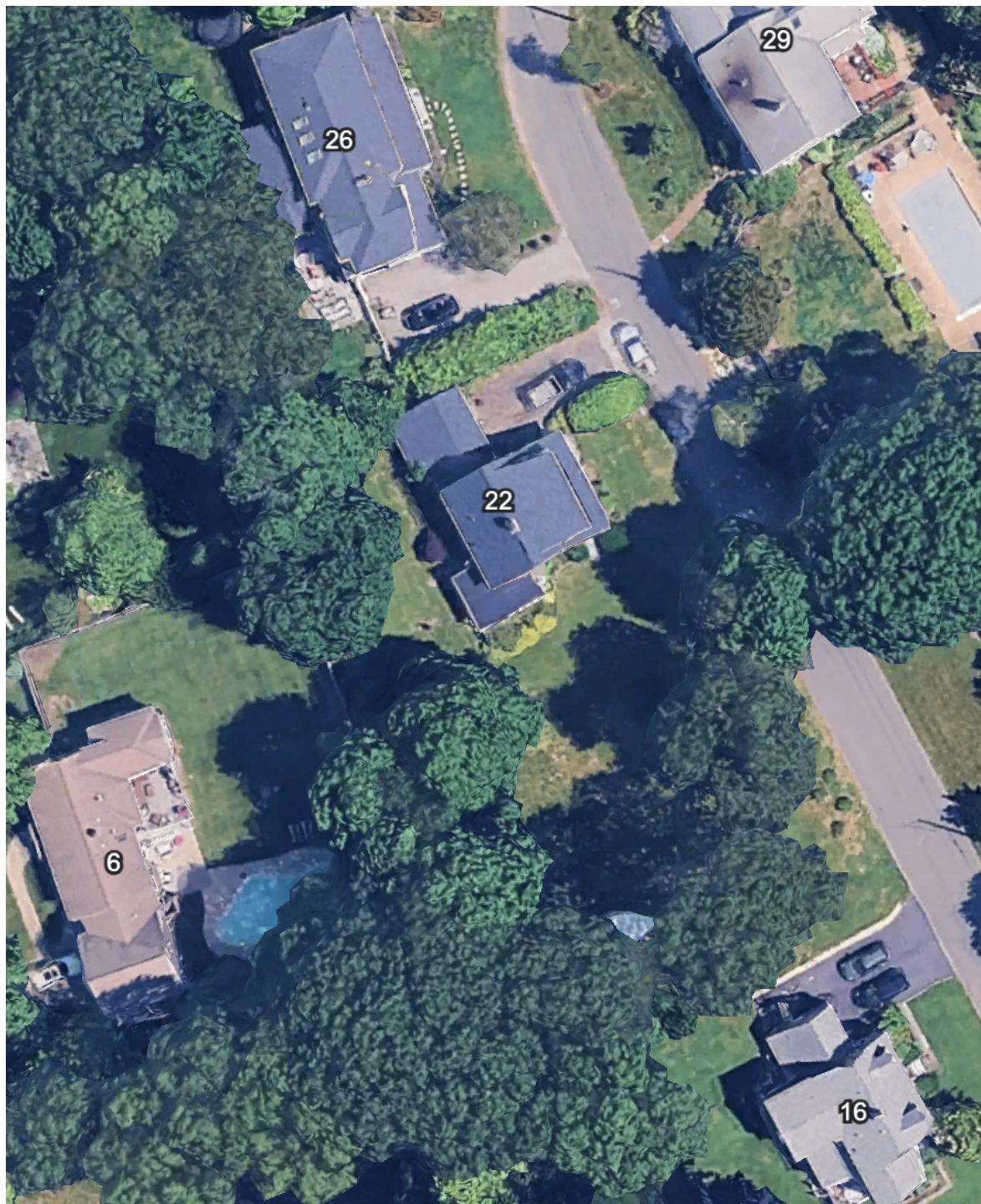
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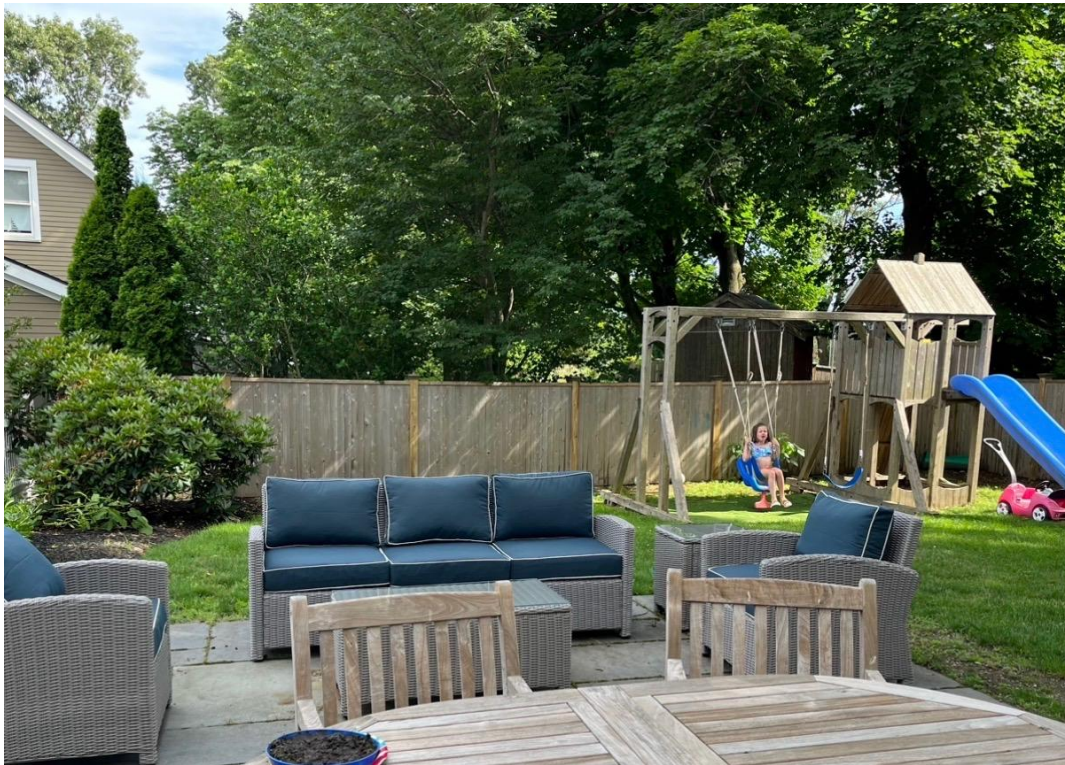
Attachments

Exhibit A – Photographs of 22 Howe Street, Pre and Post Clearing

Google Earth, October 2025



Pre-Clearing Condition (view from 26 Howe Street backyard toward 22 Howe property line)



Post-Clearing Condition (view from 26 Howe Street backyard toward 22 Howe property line)



Pre-Clearing Condition (looking up Howe Street from 16 Howe)



Post-Clearing Condition (looking up Howe Street from 16 Howe)



Pre-Clearing Condition (view from West View Circle property line)



Post-Clearing Condition (view from West View Circle property line)



