

May 2, 2025

Kelly Faulkner and Melissa Michel
175 Echo Cove Road
South Hamilton, MA 01982

Dear Members of the Zoning Board:

If you've ever driven through a neighborhood and thought, "That house just doesn't fit," then you'll understand our concern about the proposed home at 186 Echo Cove Road. We purchased our home at 175 Echo Cove less than a year ago because we were drawn to the tree-lined street, the lake's proximity, and the modest, welcoming character of the homes here. We weren't looking for a neighborhood of oversized estates—we chose this location for its charm and sense of scale. Unlike many lakeside streets, Echo Cove has retained much of its original mid-20th-century aesthetic. Most of the homes reflect that history, having evolved thoughtfully over time. We enjoy the lake view from our home and worry that the proposed structure, in both size and placement, will overwhelm that view and disrupt the visual harmony of the neighborhood. If built as proposed, this would be one of the largest lakefront homes on this street—on one of the smallest lots. We believe this imbalance could negatively impact not only the character of the street but also the property values of surrounding homes, including our own (see attached view from 175 Echo Cove Road front bedroom).

If you haven't driven down Echo Cove Road, we'd like to give a sense of the neighborhood's character by comparing the proposed building to existing lakefront properties on this quiet, dead-end street. Many of the homes are original or converted cabins that have been thoughtfully expanded to suit family living. Although the proposed plans lack precise measurements, available details suggest the house will be approximately 3,000 square feet—excluding the garage and several "unfinished" spaces on the first and third (possibly fourth) floors. Built partially on stilts, the upper floors extend beyond the foundation footprint. The property at 186 Echo Cove is one of the smallest waterfront lots on the road. Two similarly sized lots, 164 and 210, have homes of approximately 2,000 and 1,500 square feet, respectively. Of these, 210 is the most comparable in lot size; due to its slope, only one level—standing at about half the square footage of the proposed home—is visible from the street. With the exception of three large colonials set a considerable distance from the road, on lots of an acre or more, and out of sight of the lake, most homes in the neighborhood are single or two stories. In scale and visibility, the proposed building would stand out significantly from the established character of Echo Cove Road.

In our understanding, the proposal does not meet the basic criteria for a variance. As noted, the shape, topography, and soil conditions of 186 Echo Cove Road are not substantially different from other lots on the street. Several nearby properties, such as 174 and 244, also feature irregular, pie-shaped lots due to the road and shoreline curvature. The proposed structure exceeds the size and intent of what is permitted by current zoning bylaws. There is no demonstrated hardship; a single-family home consistent in scale and character with others on similarly-sized lots could be constructed without requiring variances. The proposed plans instead outline three distinct suites intended for segmented living more similar to a dorm—each with its own bedroom, living space, laundry, and bathroom(s)—connected only by a shared kitchen. Any claimed hardship is self-imposed, as the lot's limitations were known at the time of purchase and have not changed. Moreover, the project raises broader concerns for the public interest. The deed for 186 clearly identifies the Way as a hard property line, not a soft boundary from

which a 10-foot side yard setback can be borrowed, nor one granting rights to the centerline. Similar deed language exists throughout the neighborhood, indicating this public strip is not private land. The ongoing need for residents to assert their rights over this area is unreasonable and contrary to the public good. Finally, the proposal references past variances—such as the garage at 198 Echo Cove—to argue for neighborhood consistency. However, prior exceptions should not be used to justify further erosion of zoning standards.

In closing, we respectfully submit the following outstanding questions for the Board's consideration:

- What is the full height of the proposed structure?
- Does the design include three or four floors?
- Is the minimum side yard setback the only zoning regulation for which a variance is needed? Is enough information provided in the request to answer this question?
- How does the proposed construction affect the stream on the public way between 186 and 174 that flows into the lake?

We ask the Board to give serious consideration to the personal, financial, environmental, and public implications of this proposal. In light of these concerns, we respectfully urge you to deny the request and encourage a more modest and context-appropriate plan.

Thank you for your attention. We look forward to discussing these questions further at the May 7 meeting.

Thank you,

Kelly Faulkner & Melissa Michel

175 Echo Cove Road, current view from front bedroom window (May 2025)

