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Sent: Sunday, August 28, 2016 8:27 PM

To: Neil Wishinsky; Alison Steinfeld

Cc: Ken Wexler; Detlev Suderow

Subject: Response to 1299 Beacon Street proposal

August 29, 2016

Mr. Neil Wishinsky, Chair
Brookline Board of Selectmen

Re: 1299 Beacon Street Proposed Development

Dear Mr. Wishinsky:

I am a resident of 70 Sewall Avenue, writing to express my concerns over the proposed development at 1299 Beacon Street, aka the Neena's property. Although our building is less than a block from the development site, we had not received any direct notification about this project, and learned about it from our neighbors. I have a number of significant issues with the development as currently illustrated in the documents submitted by the proponent and CBT Architects, and feel that it is much too large and fundamentally ill-conceived for this site. I should also point out that I am an architect with forty years of experience.

Bulk and Massing: the proposed project, at 12 stories, is nearly four times the height of abutting properties, and would apparently be one of the tallest buildings in Brookline. This site in Coolidge Corner is completely inappropriate to accommodate such a large building. I believe that the 40B guidelines published by the Commonwealth cite compatibility with adjacent and nearby structures as a threshold criterion, and the proposed project fails utterly on that count. There is nothing in the proposed design that I could label as "compatible" in its context. If it were reduced to, say five stories, it might be more palatable.

Parking, Traffic Capacity and Vehicular Circulation: Sewall Avenue would clearly be the primary street serving the building's residents and their cars. This is another fundamental problem, because that section of Sewall, between Longwood and Charles Street, is already heavily congested for much of the day. The Post Office is one primary source of this congestion, as their trucks (and their workers) are parked right at the bend in the street, often straddling the curb, making walking hazardous. Second, Temple Sinai generates both foot and vehicular traffic due to its school and weekly services. Third, the removal of Trader Joe's overflow parking (in the Neena's lot) will intensify the traffic problems that already exist at the market.

While the idea of stacked parking and valet service might be a useful amenity, I am confident the sheer quantity of cars being addressed in this proposed development—that is, the throughput of the valets handling cars at peak times—will result in added backups of cars onto Longwood and Sewall. Again, this street network is already strained by existing loads. We cannot allow this many cars to be added to these streets.

Finally, I want to point out that Coolidge Corner, as a transit-served neighborhood, would be an appropriate place to drastically reduce the amount of parking being provided by new developments.

That is one of the fundamental tenets of what is called “transit-oriented development.” Even if 108 housing units were to be deemed appropriate on this site (which I feel they are not), a parking ratio of, perhaps, 0.5 parking space per unit would make more sense. The residents should be using the T or renting Zipcars. In short, Sewall Avenue cannot handle the volume of 183 additional cars from 1299 Beacon Street, without exacerbating an already hazardous condition.

Building Program and Design: I seriously question the viability of second-floor retail on this site. Not only is the visibility from the street essentially non-existent (and the density of retail in Coolidge Corner is lower than it should be to justify such an approach), but I question how it will be serviced, since the proposed loading dock looks undersized. Where is the dumpster? Where will delivery vehicles park while loading/unloading? How can these activities not interfere with the current and ongoing traffic in this area?

The building’s elevations don’t help the developer’s case. The size of the architectural gestures actually emphasizes its oversized bulk. Though, to be sure, there is no way to hide its actual 12-story height, no matter how the architects delineate floors or groups of floors. The building is simply too big—a literal “blockbuster.”

Accessibility: After reviewing the plans, I don’t see any accessible parking as required by the ADA; even if 40B developments may be exempt from compliance with Mass. AAB regulations, the garage needs several accessible spaces as well as van parking. It isn’t at all clear that the proposed stacking/valet system can even accommodate accessible parking. I would also imagine that many of the prospective occupants of this building would be older, thereby increasing the likely demand for accessible spaces.

I want to summarize by being as direct as I can. I feel that Coolidge Corner can handle sensitive, properly-scaled development that fits properly into the context. However, the developer and the architects of this proposed development should be embarrassed by its size, height, bulk and design. To propose something so clearly over-scaled—by a factor of 3 to 4—on this site is ludicrous and indicates a level of arrogance and greed that I find appalling.

Please reject this project as proposed.

Regards,
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