November 1, 2016

Alison Steinfeld, Director
BROOKLINE DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
333 Washington Street
Brookline, MA 02445

RE: 420 Harvard Street
Architectural Peer Review Final Report

Dear Alison:

I’m writing to provide you with a Peer Review Final Report in accordance with my proposal submitted to you dated August 3, 2016. I will incorporate new comments within my previous Peer Review Report dated August 27, 2016. That report was presented to the ZBA on August 30, 2016. In addition, I have added another section that includes design-related considerations for conditions that could potentially be included in an approved Comprehensive Permit. All new comments and report section(s) will be highlighted in italics (blue, if printed in color).

1. Review of the Developer’s Application, Plans, and Drawings (and other related documents)

   Documents reviewed (comments on documents contained in Section 5 below):
   - Email from Jerry Katz to Polly Selkoe dated March 13, 2016.
   - Letter from Brookline Housing Advisory Board to BOS dated March 15, 2016
   - Letter from Brookline Board of Selectmen to David Hanifin (MHP) dated March 24, 2016.
   - Drawing set “420 Harvard St...MHP Submission” dated April 29, 2016.
   - JFK Crossing, Brookline, MA Zoning Board of Appeals Comprehensive Permit Application dated May, 2016 (16-section binder includes numerous documents that may be referred to in this Peer Review).
   - Drawing set “420 Harvard Street” dated May 3, 2016 (included in the Comp Permit Application) consisting of aerial views of site, ground level photographs of nearby context, schematic floor plans (block diagrams), unit breakdown matrix, 4 aerial perspectives, and a Landscape Plan.
   - Drawing set “420 Harvard Street, Revised Scheme-Access from Fuller” dated August 8, 2016, consisting of revised plans, elevations, site section, ramp section, axon views, and shadow studies.
   - Emails from Savikar Kanchanavanit to Maria Morelli dated June 28 and June 30, 2016.
   - Email from Tom Gunning to Maria Morelli dated June 30, 2016.
   - Email from Lynn Rosenberg to Maria Morelli dated July 12, 2016.
   - 420 Harvard Street Local Concerns (slide show, not dated).
   - Planning Board Design Analysis dated July 14, 2016.
   - Letter from Ernest and Christine Adams to ZBA and Planning Board (not dated).
   - Letter from Planning Board to ZBA dated July 16, 2016.
   - Letter from Bernice Rose to Planning and Community Development Commission dated July 16, 2016.
   - Letter from Kent Mitchell to the ZBA dated July 18, 2016.
   - Email from Hayley Greenberg to Maria Morelli dated July 18, 2016.
   - Email from Mary Nickerson to Maria Morelli dated July 19, 2016.
   - Email from Annette Pringle to Maria Morelli dated July 20, 2016.
2. **Initial Meeting at the site with the Developer’s Design team and Representative of the Town**

Members of the development team conducted a site walkthrough, followed up with a meeting at the Remax offices at 420 Harvard Street on the morning of August 11, 2016. Attending included Cliff Boehmer (Architectural Peer Reviewer), Maria Morelli (Brookline Department of Planning & Community Development), Victor Sheen (Oakgrove Residential, Inc.), and Jonathan Parkes.

Observations at the walkthrough included an overhead power service that traverses the site off of Fuller Street to a pole that appears to feed neighboring structures, the right of way that accesses the main site from Coolidge Street, fire damage at the neighboring retail establishment, and the street frontage along both Fuller and Coolidge Streets. Most of the discussion afterwards was focused at reviewing revised project drawings dated August 8, 2016. Major changes from the May 3 drawing set include the elimination of balconies, angling of the north elevation to broaden the view corridor from Coolidge Street through to Fuller, the elimination of the stepped elevation on the north side, the replacement of the mechanical parking system with a more conventional ramped access to the basement parking area, and the inclusion of the Coolidge Street single family home into the project (where there will reportedly be one or two 3-bedroom units).
In response to a request by the Peer Reviewer to see more 3-dimensional renderings—particularly from street level—the developer offered to share the preliminary Revit model that has been developed by Embarc, the project architect (a Dropbox link was emailed on August 22).

No new comments.

3. **Conduct site visit and reconnaissance assessment of surrounding residential and nonresidential areas within one mile of the project site.**

Harvard Street/Avenue is an approximately 2-mile stretch of road that runs between Cambridge Street in Boston, south/southeast to Washington Street in Brookline. It passes through several Brookline concentrated commercial areas, including Brookline Village, Coolidge Corner (Brookline’s largest commercial area), JFK Crossing, and then into Boston where Commonwealth Avenue intersects, creating another concentrated commercial area. Generally, on Harvard Street in Brookline, between the more concentrated commercial zones, there are a variety of building types and uses, with some variation in scale and setback. Most prevalent are 1.0 story commercial uses, with little or no setback. There are a variety of 3-story, masonry apartment buildings with no setback, or with modest setbacks adequate for landscaping. Several large “historic” woodframe, former homes exist, generally with significant, landscaped setback. The street wall is periodically broken by parking lots, or atypical, most likely existing non-conforming uses (e.g., gas stations, supermarket with open field of parking along the street, etc.). Taller, civic or religious structures are set back from the street to compensate for their increased building height.

There is also some two-story commercial use, particularly within the Coolidge Corner area (retail on first level, other commercial use on the second floor). There appears to be very little mixed residential/commercial development (i.e., most commercial buildings are 100% commercial, and most multi-family buildings are 100% residential). There is only one (two, counting the attic level of the S.S. Pierce Building, assuming it is residential), 4-story residential building with no setback from Harvard Street (south of Coolidge Corner at Vernon Street). One other 4-story residential building is just north of Coolidge Corner, but it is set back something like 12 to 15 feet from the sidewalk.

The tallest structure on the entire length of Harvard Street (with the possible exception of the bell-tower at St. Mary’s) appears to be the Brookline Professional Building, a five story (parking at first level) commercial structure set back about 10 feet from the sidewalk. The entire length of Harvard Street is very pedestrian friendly, with fully-adapted-to-broad sidewalks, articulated by some street trees, activated by many commercial storefronts, and some outdoor dining opportunities. The length of Harvard Street is served by buses, and it crosses two Green Line train tracks (B and C), and dead ends in another (D).

So while there is a wide range of building types and scale along Harvard Street, there is a consistent attitude towards maintaining a pleasant streetscape. Larger civic/religious structures are set back with landscaping and/or extended entry zones (e.g., grand staircases), and smaller scale residential and commercial uses hold the sidewalk streetwall line, or are set back enough for modest landscaping. The two-block area along Harvard that frames the proposed development site is an unbroken stretch of single-story retail uses, all with a very strong horizontal expression at the cornice/parapet level, with a consistent storefront head height.

Generally, side streets that intersect Harvard are lined with one and two-family, 2.5 story woodframe homes, hip or gable roofs, with setbacks adequate for landscaping and creation of a semi-private outdoor zone. Interspersed among the small structures are numerous 3-story, typically masonry, flat-roof multi-family structures, with common entry vestibules that create the transition from street to private corridors and stairs. There is a 4-story masonry multifamily building on Fuller across from the intersection of Centre. This building is set back between 15 and 20 feet, and it includes a one story entry piece that brings the scale down to pedestrian level. This pattern of smaller woodframe homes mixed in with three story masonry multi-family buildings on side streets is very similar after passing into Boston onto Harvard Avenue.

No new comments.
4. **Consult with the Applicant’s design team, as appropriate.**
   As noted above, there was a meeting with the applicant’s design team immediately following the August 11 site walkthrough. The peer reviewer has had no contact with the team since then (other than indirect contact through the Planning Department in order to gain access to the developer’s Revit model).

   *Since the August 11 meeting, there were working session meetings attended by the Peer Reviewer and planning staff on September 1, September 7, and October 4, 2016, as well as a working session phone conference call on October 26, 2016.*

5. **Provide an oral presentation to the ZBA within approximately one month of the notice to proceed.**
   *Said presentation shall include comments and preliminary recommendations on the following:*

   (This report will be presented to a ZBA meeting on Tuesday, August 30, 2016)

   *Final report will be presented to the ZBA on Wednesday, November 2, 2016.*

   a. **Orientation of buildings in relation to each other, and to streets, parking areas, open space, and on-site amenities, and to solar access.**

   The proposal is to build a new six-story building that covers most of the Fuller/Harvard site with either building footprint, ramp structures down to the parking level, or surface parking spaces. The project has incorporated an existing home on Coolidge Street (which will reportedly house one or two 3-bedroom units), immediately adjacent to the retail use on the corner of Coolidge and Harvard. The development reportedly includes a total of 36 units (2@studio; 20@1-bedroom; 10@2-bedroom; 4@3-bedroom), 12 at-grade parking spaces, and 28 basement parking spaces. The originally submitted plan that indicated a mechanized parking system has been abandoned in favor of surface parking plus ramp-accessed basement spaces.

   *Current proposal is a four story + penthouse level structure with a basement level that includes 23 parking spaces, trash/recycling room, and bike parking. There are a total of 25 dwelling units, that include 2 located in an existing structure on Coolidge Street. Unit breakdown is 3@studio, 6@1-BR, 11@2-BR, and 5@3-BR. One van accessible parking space is located at grade beneath the primary structure, and 4 tandem spaces are located alongside the small structure on Coolidge.*

   Between the historic home and the new structure, spanning underground parking spaces, an open-to-the-air courtyard is proposed, along with an area designated for bicycle parking. There is an additional eight foot wide open space proposed between the parking ramps and the property line along the southwest border (“project south”) on Fuller that could provide some landscape buffering.

   *There remains, as in previous plans, an open air landscaped courtyard between the two structures. Planted areas, as well as paved passive recreation areas are indicated on the Landscape Plan. The site area between the up-ramp and the neighboring property on Fuller Street is five feet wide, which may include a concrete walk and a narrow planting strip that runs along to existing fence owned by the Fuller Street neighbor (Ground Floor Plan and the Landscape Plan are not consistent with respect to layout within that space). There is also an inconsistency between the Landscape and Ground Floor plans relative to the layout of the van accessible space and its associated aisle/loading area.

   Open patio space includes a stair down to the parking level. There is space on the west side of the existing Coolidge Street building that could provide a pedestrian connection between Coolidge and Fuller (although a gate across the walkway is indicated at the rear wall of the existing structure).*

   A loading zone is proposed off of Coolidge, presumably shared with the retail use on the corner, along with two, tandem-style parking spaces. There is a right of way on the neighboring property that could provide pedestrian access to the new building site from Coolidge. Both Coolidge and Fuller are two-way streets.

   *Loading zone remains off of Fuller, but is now adjacent to the van accessible space beneath the primary structure.*

   Approximately half of the length of the building along Fuller Street is open at the ground level to accommodate surface parking and access to the ramps that connect the parking level to the street. The combined length of the curb cuts that access those elements is about 44 feet. It is not clear from the plans or elevations what material is employed to screen parked cars from view beyond the width of the parking area access (without screening or solid walls, that could add 18 feet to the open to view parking area).
residential lobby is off of Fuller Street, and commercial entry is depicted off of Harvard. The footprint of the existing structure on Harvard has been expanded to match the zero setback of the retail use to the west. A single, mature street tree is in front of the building, near the corner of Fuller.

Open area along Fuller is now reduced to about 40% of the length of the building (about 10 feet less than in previous design). Residential entry remains off of Fuller, with commercial entry indicated off of both Harvard and Fuller.

b. Function, use and adequacy of open space and landscaped areas.
As noted above, open space is limited to a shared courtyard, a buffer zone to the south on Fuller, and the front yard at 49 Coolidge. It is not clear that the existing mature street tree on Harvard will survive the construction process or the pruning that would be required to shape the crown to the proposed new structure.
No new comments.

c. Use and treatment of natural resources.
This reviewer is not aware of any natural resources that are threatened by the proposed development.
No new comments.

d. Building design, massing and scale in relationship to the surrounding context and topography.
The “language” of the building is minimally depicted in the building elevations (very generic, not annotated), along with non-specific notes in the Project Narrative provided by the architect. The narrative cites “A combination of full height store front system......large format stone veneer panels” at the first level, with levels two through five that “play off of the traditional Brookline vernacular with materials that will draw from the neighboring structures (various cladding, siding materials and color palette).” This reviewer could find no information regarding the sixth floor cladding (which is rendered differently than the main body on the elevations), nor any more specific information about the selection of materials on the other levels.
Accordingly, it is difficult to comment on relationship to vernacular, etc. relative to materiality. In addition to missing information on typical floor designs, no elevator/stair penthouses or mechanical equipment screening are depicted in the elevations or the axonometric views that were provided.

Building design has changed radically since the original submission. Most significantly, since the December 2015 submission, unit count has dropped from 36 to 25, 1.5 stories have been eliminated (building height has dropped from 64 feet to 56’-10”), parking spaces are reduced to 28 from 40 (no “automated” spaces are included in the count). Cladding materials are now called out on drawings to include cedar siding at the residential entry area, metal/cement fiber panels (not clear if it is both or one or the other), and stone veneer panels.

The façade fenestration as seen in the elevations consists of simple, repeated patterns of what appear to be somewhat “oversized” fixed-over-projected windows. This pattern is carried across all floors two through five with virtually no variation in window types.

Residential floors two through four retain simple window patterning, but do appear residential in nature. Penthouse level changes pattern to create visual break from main body.

There is no articulation in the main body of the façade that could accentuate important design elements (retail entry, resident entry, corner condition, vehicular access, etc.).

Façade now is articulated at all levels, including bays at typical residential floors, framed residential entry off of Fuller, and significant horizontal banding and awnings at the commercial level. Individual commercial entries are understated at this point (perhaps waiting for specific information regarding tenants and division of commercial area).

The length of the façade along Fuller Street is approximately 110 feet long, with no articulation that could relate it to the scale of the existing residential development on the street (existing multi-family facades on Fuller are broken up with multiple entries, human scale detailing, etc.).

Fuller Street façade is significantly improved by diminished width of space under overhang, narrower curb cut, well defined residential entry, strong commercial level and bay window articulation, and much-increased set back at penthouse level from the Fuller Street neighbor.
The sixth floor, “attic” level is set back something like five feet on all elevations, and the fenestration pattern is offset a little from the floor below.

*Penthouse “attic” level is now set back 10’-3” from Fuller Street line, 17’-2.5” from Harvard Street, 10’-2” from Harvard Street neighbor, and between 69 and 73 feet back from the Fuller Street neighbor. There are two private decks indicated on the Harvard Street side that look to be about 4 feet from the main body of the building.*

It is not clear how the horizontal banding at the division between first and second levels relates to adjacent and/or nearby retail uses. Same is true of what is proposed for storefront design (i.e., no street elevations showing context are provided).

*Harvard Street elevation now indicates height of adjacent structure at 428 Harvard. Sign banding, awning heights, and other detailing of the adjacent structures are shown in the perspective renderings included in the current drawing set.*

The end of the building that is propped up along Fuller lacks connection to the ground and appears precarious.

*No longer the case, as the length of the overhanging area has been diminished.*

The new building’s massing, and scale are radically and abruptly at variance with the surrounding context, both along Harvard and Fuller Streets. It is likely that the building if constructed as currently proposed would be the tallest structure anywhere on Harvard Street, all along its run through Brookline. It is the opinion of this reviewer that the height of the building (almost 64 feet to the main roof), as well as its unbroken length along Fuller Street, combined with zero front and side setbacks, puts it significantly outside of existing development patterns over the entire distance along Harvard Street/Avenue from Brookline Village to Cambridge Street in Boston.

*As noted above, the building design has radically changed since the original conception. Current design is a very good precedent for future mixed-use buildings along Harvard Street.*

While the site is arguably generally appropriate for residential development, the scale, massing, setbacks (and perhaps façade design) create a typology wholly outside of existing fabric. The impact of the streetscape will be significant, as will the degradation of privacy and access to natural light to the immediate neighbor on Fuller Street.

*Relationship of the proposed structure to the neighbor on Fuller Street is greatly improved from previous plans due to diminution of building height and large setback at attic penthouse level.*

**e. Side and rear elevations visible from the public street, public areas and from the vantage point of nearby residential neighborhoods.**

The south elevation on Fuller street, assuming the presence of the tapered “view corridor,” is between about 15 and 25 feet from the neighboring home, with five levels of apartments facing the neighbor.

*Current design is uniformly 21’-9” from the neighboring home, with three levels of apartments facing the neighbor, along with the attic level set back between about 76 to 80 feet.*

Two levels look directly across at the habitable floors of the home, and the three remaining floors either look at or over the neighbor’s roof.

*See note above.*

In addition to the nearness of the six story massing, the 44-foot curb cut along Fuller Street is problematic. While it is arguable that the existing open parking area is of similar width, it is open to the sky, and there are only two lanes of car movement to monitor. The proposed curb cut accommodates two incoming, and two outgoing lanes (one of which is coming up a ramp towards the sidewalk), and the south end of the building is propped above, casting year-round afternoon shadows on the street, the surface parking spaces, and the ramp access to the basement parking. In addition to pedestrian issues on the sidewalk, developing a convincing building elevation that suitably “grounds” the building, screens parking spaces, and is supportive of existing development is challenging.
These issues have largely been resolved in the current design. Primary traffic that must be monitored is limited to up and down ramp to parking level (along with very limited use of loading area and van accessible space). Shadow impact is lessened by increased setback of attic level from Fuller Street property line. Volume of building supported by columns along parking ramps is lessened, combined with more footprint that engages grade has adequately “grounded” the building. Remaining question regarding curb cut to parking is whether sidewalk should be carried across at existing level, or should sidewalk ramp down to meet street level (there are arguments that support either approach).

The west elevation of the building that will be visible from Harvard Street approaching is drawn with a high percentage of window area. Is this actually possible given the nearness to the adjacent property? *Project architect has confirmed that percentage of openness relative to distance from property line meets building code limitations.*

f. **Pedestrian and vehicular circulation**

The original submission included mechanized vehicular access to basement parking, supplemented by surface parking beneath the south end of the building. While the current plan that dispenses with the auto transfer area is easier to envision from a technical perspective, as noted above, the shift to a traditional ramp system combined with surface spaces creates other issues (related to the Fuller Street building elevation and the pedestrian environment). The question of the best parking solution is still open in this reviewer’s mind. *Mechanized parking scheme has been abandoned in favor of traditional ramps to parking level. Several safety issues have been addressed by decreasing slope of exit ramp, addition of a speed bump, heated ramps, and pedestrian warning lights.*

g. **Integration of buildings and site, including but not limited to preservation of existing tree cover**

The site is currently fully occupied by a commercial use (virtually 100% impervious surfaces) and has one mature tree in front on public land. Consideration should be given to adding street trees along Harvard. *No new comments.*

h. **Exterior materials**

No information available for review. *See comments above.*

i. **Energy efficiency**

No information available for review. Brookline has adopted the energy Stretch Code, which will ensure a relatively high level of sustainability, at least from an operating perspective. *No new comments.*

j. **Exterior lighting**

No information available for review. *New drawings include images of some light fixtures, but no detail as to specific details regarding size and performance, quantity, location, etc.*

k. **Proposed landscape elements, planting materials, and planting design**

No new landscape plan provided with revised scheme. *Current Landscape Plan includes significant detail, including ground finishes, proposed plantings, and furnishings.*

l. **Feasibility of incorporating environmental and energy performance standards in the design, construction and operation of the buildings, such as standards required for LEED certification**

No information that expresses the developer’s desire to design and construct to a third-party-verifiable level is included in the application materials, beyond the Project Narrative that states “Specific attention will be placed on making this a ‘sustainable’ project, carefully selecting products from appliances through building components to achieve this level of sustainability.” *No new comments.*
m. Any other design-related considerations (and/or potential conditions) identified by the consultant in the course of its review

- Floor plans are limited to “fit plans” that box out the gross square footage of the units within the proposed overall footprint of the building. It is not possible to review conformance with some code requirements (for example, accessibility). Fit plans do not indicate locations/types of proposed Group 2 accessible units. Note that all units in elevator-fed buildings must be at a minimum, Group 1 units. Current floor plans now show full unit layouts. No apparent issues with proposed plans. Not clear if proposal is to include two or four accessible units. Code requirements are exceeded in either case.
- It is possible that the Fire Department will have concerns about access to all elevations of the large buildings. To be confirmed by project architect.
- How will trash be handled on the site? Generous trash and recycle room at parking level with elevator access. Narrative describing disposal plan should be provided.
- No rooftop elevator extension, penthouses, mechanical equipment screening, etc. are depicted in the submitted drawings. These elements need to be provided. Roof plan and building elevations now depict screening of mechanical equipment. Conformance with local noise ordinances will have to be demonstrated during permitting process.
- During the initial meeting on August 11, the developer stated that there would not be stairway access to the roof. Is this realistic given the amount of mechanical equipment that will be there? No new comments (not clear that stair penthouse would create significant impact).
- Particularly given the scale of the proposed development and the extremely constrained site area available for layout, a Construction Management Plan should be submitted for review. No new comments.
- Does the power company have an easement over the site for the overhead lines? No new comments.
- Provision of on-site resident amenities should be considered (most likely made possible by diminishing the size of the retail space). Current plans now indicate “Leasing Office and Amenities” @950 SF.
- The surface parking spaces under the Harvard Street building show accessible spaces that share a five-foot aisle. A van-accessible space must be provided that requires an eight-foot aisle. Current plans appear to be code compliant.
- Traffic/parking analysis should be updated to reflect current plan (or to consider other options that mitigate some of the issues cited in this report). Not clear to this reviewer if this has been completed.
- Stormwater plan needs to be adapted to new configuration. No new comments.

n. Techniques to mitigate visual impact

- As discussed in detail above, the project is significantly out of conformance with existing development patterns along the entire length of Harvard Street/Avenue. At a minimum, to mitigate this problem, the relationship of building height to setback must be “re-calibrated”, the best solution likely being to lower the overall height of the structure, and to create a strong alignment of the first floor retail reference roof/cornice line on Harvard. Another potential solution is to lose less height, but create a meaningful setback of the upper floors from Harvard and Fuller Street. Issues with conformance with existing development patterns have been resolved. As noted above, the current proposal is a structure that is a good prototype for mixed use development on Harvard Street.
- The setback from the neighboring structure on Fuller should be increased to diminish privacy and access-to-light issues. Increased setback incorporated into new plans.
- Setback along Fuller Street should be increased, particularly given how narrow the right of way is. No new comments.
o. Consideration of potential 40B conditions/outstanding questions.
   • Preservation (or replacement in kind if necessary) of existing mature street tree is a priority.
   • Review of commercial signage and lighting in context of mixed use prototype should be considered.
   • Preservation or rebuilding of retaining wall at Fuller Street lot line should be incorporated into scope.
   • Elevation of curb cuts along Fuller Street must be resolved.
   • Should pedestrian circulation between Fuller and Coolidge be allowed?
   • Transformer placement and relocation of service feeds to neighboring structures must be resolved.
   • Should exterior stair access to parking level be reconsidered to provide for a planting strip along Fuller Street neighbor’s site?
   • A “record” submission of drawings must resolve inconsistencies in various drawings.

I hope you will contact me to discuss this memo in detail, or to talk about issues that I have failed to cover.
Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Clifford Boehmer, AIA