



Town of Brookline

Massachusetts

Brookline Preservation Commission

David King, Chair
Elton Elperin, Vice-Chair
James Batchelor
Paul Bell
Wendy Ecker
Rosemary Battles Foy
Peter Kleiner
Kirstin Gamble Bridier, Alternate
Giti Ganjei Saeidian, Alternate
David C. Jack, Alternate
Richard Panciera, Alternate

January 17, 2016

Dear Members of the Zoning Board of Appeals,

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the proposed 384 Harvard Street Chapter 40B Comprehensive Permit Application, proposed by Jewish Community Housing for the Elderly (JCHE). The Brookline Preservation Commission appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on the proposed design. The Commission understands the project includes the construction of a new building with 62 100% affordable units on the site of the existing Epstein Auditorium within the Temple Kehillath Israel complex on Harvard Street.

Kehillath Israel, Brookline's first synagogue, was built in 1925 in the near-Eastern (Byzantine) classic style, featuring an imposing two-story structure of cast concrete set on a high podium with a grand staircase leading up to the entry bays and prominent corner towers crowned by copper domes. The Epstein Auditorium building, designed by the architecture firm of Krokyn, Browne, and Rosenstein, was constructed in 1948. The auditorium and community house stands parallel with, and south of the temple itself. The later building recalls the earlier synagogue structure, but displays a more restrained, streamlined classical façade. Like the temple, it sits on a high podium with a broad flight of stairs leading to the three tall double doors. A brick vestibule was added below this structure in 1964.

The Commission understands that the proposed new construction involves the demolition of the existing Epstein Auditorium building. At its January 10, 2017, public hearing the Commission reviewed the proposed plans for the site and provided the following comments:

- The Commission noted the importance of integrating the new building within the existing synagogue complex.
- While the Commission responded positively to the proposed connector piece, they noted that the storefront sections should appear more visually unified with the original synagogue structure. The Commission suggested this could be done through a modification of materials, colors, fenestration, etc.
- The Commission noted that the storefronts themselves should also be better unified as it appears now to be visually divided. The Commission recommends achieving this through

modifying the materials, altering the height of the existing storefronts to create a single roofline and fascia treatment, and creating a more consistent rhythm of fenestration. These changes would help integrate the new building within the existing commercial character of Harvard Street.

- The Commission responded quite favorably to the pocket parks, especially the open space on Harvard Street which includes design features that emulate the high entry staircase of the both the synagogue as well as the Epstein Auditorium building.
- The Commission did express some concern over the project's impact on the view of the existing synagogue and would recommend that additional views be rendered from further down Harvard Street to better evaluate the new building's impact on the historic synagogue structure. The additional views will also better illustrate how the proposed new building will be integrated into the larger Harvard Street streetscape.

In general, the Brookline Preservation Commission responded favorably to the design of the proposed project. On behalf of the Commission, I again express gratitude for the opportunity to provide comments to the Zoning Board of Appeals regarding the 384 Harvard Street project proposed by JCHE.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Meghan Hanrahan Richard". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Meghan Hanrahan Richard, Preservation
Planner for the Commission

Cc: David King, Chair, Brookline Preservation Commission
Alison Steinfeld, Director of Planning and Community Development
Daniel Bennett, Building Commissioner
Linda Hamlin, Chair, Planning Board
Mel Kleckner, Town Administrator