

May 14, 2017

Dear Zoning Board of Appeals,

We are writing again to express our concerns regarding the 40B proposal currently under consideration for 455 Harvard St. We live at 82 Thorndike St, so there is only one house between us and the proposed development.

We have many concerns about this project but will limit our comments to our largest concerns.

1. Pedestrian safety and traffic safety

The project proposes 17 units with 12 stacked garage spots. The current plan proposes to have the garage exit onto Thorndike Street. The proposed access is directly across from Shimon's Service Station where there is also an exit on Thorndike Street. This is going to create a log jam of cars trying to exit from the 455 Harvard property and Shimon's, which will be at its worst as many children are walking to school in the morning. The sidewalk along Thorndike adjacent to the proposed building is narrow, especially near a tree that the developers have stated they will keep in previous hearings. If the property is built out to the property line with the extremely small setback proposed as the property moves down Thorndike Street, there will be a very narrow passage that will be especially difficult to navigate as a pedestrian, especially if waking with a child and/or pushing a stroller. In addition to negatively affecting pedestrian travel along Thorndike, the proposal will also complicate crossing Thorndike Street at Harvard where pedestrians (including children walking to and from school) are already dealing with traffic coming from four directions plus exiting/entering Shimon's on both Harvard and Thorndike Street. In addition, any current traffic study will significantly underestimate the volume of children walking down Harvard St past this development because the Devotion School is under construction and many children are now taking alternate forms of transportation to school. This volume will return in the fall of 2018.

The developers include a site study on slide 23 of their 3/30/2017 presentation that has deleted the tree, telephone pole and fire hydrant immediately to the left of the proposed driveway and ignore the impact of these structures blocking sight lines down Thorndike St. These structures are also omitted on slide 31. The image in slide 31 also eliminates the verge making the sidewalks appear much broader as they pass the proposed property. These sight lines are very important because of the unsafe conditions that already exist with cars traveling well over the speed limit down Thorndike to the intersection with Harvard St. The additional traffic at 455 and worsened sight lines will also create additional risk for pedestrians by compounding the congestion that already exists due to the extremely tight fit for two-way traffic plus street parking. In addition, the proposed loading zone in front of the property on Harvard Street will block sight lines from Thorndike down Harvard St towards Comm Ave, which will already be greatly limited by the proposal to build out to the property line on Harvard Street. Allowing the property to be build out to the property line on Thorndike Street (or within a foot at the back as you move down Thorndike Street) will also have a significantly negative impact on the pedestrian experience as one has a towering wall immediately on one side and only a narrow sidewalk and verge before the road on the other side.

Twelve parking stackers are proposed. There is also one handicap space. If a car is parked in the handicapped space, it is unclear how there will be room move one car out from the lower level of the stacker to get the upper car without moving the car out of the garage. Is moving cars in and out of the property to deal with the stackers going to create additional traffic and risk to pedestrian safety? We are also concerned about the noise that will be generated by the stackers and the garage door, as well as concerned about the safety of the stackers themselves.

2. Scale and style of the project.

This project does not fit our neighborhood and does not connect Harvard Street with the residential properties on Thorndike Street as described. This structure will hide the entrance of the neighborhood behind an enormous structure that overshadows the nearby houses. The developer is using the 40B apparatus to build a structure that is out of context with the surrounding area. They state that there are properties that contain 3 to 3.5 stories along Harvard St and they are just continuing this façade. They also state that there are many businesses with no setback along Harvard St. Both of these statements are true individually, but the union is not true. The existing taller properties along Harvard Street that the developers specifically cite that are 3 stories or higher are set back from the street. The properties that are not set back are one only story high, until you reach the intersection with Beacon and Harvard or move into Boston on Harvard Street when travelling towards Comm Ave. The proposal of a 47 foot high building with no setbacks is completely out of character with the architecture of the surrounding neighborhood.

There is also essentially no green space proposed with this project. Even 40B projects have greenspace requirements. Moving the property back from the property line on Thorndike St will allow it to fit better with the neighborhood and provide a site for greenspace.

3. Extreme proximity to neighbors on Thorndike Street

The proposed property will extend within 5 feet of the property line in the rear. The proposed building is over 70 feet wide along the rear and rises three stories. The developer and architect described the adjacent house as set back 8 feet from the property line minus the “bump out” at a town meeting about 10 days ago. This “bump out” is one of the entrances the property and a bay window on the house, so the real distance is even less. The current plan also includes outdoor balconies on the upper level of this expansive rear wall that will directly overlook the adjacent property from close proximity, with a severely negative impact on the privacy of the existing house and its owners. The town should not allow the proposed project to tower over our neighbors’ house within such a short distance; we look to the zoning board to protect residents from such an overreach by the developers.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We appreciate your efforts.

Sincerely,

Marian Harris and Alan Mullen  
82 Thorndike St.