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May 15, 2017

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

RE: 455 Harvard Street
Architectural Peer Review Report

Dear Alison:

I'm writing to provide you with a Peer Review Report in accordance with my proposal submitted to you dated April 11, 2017. I expect to present this report to the ZBA on Monday, May 15, 2017. As this is the third proposed 40B development on Harvard Street that I have reviewed for the ZBA, I have condensed the "assessment of surrounding residential and nonresidential areas_neighborhood reconnaissance," Section #3, repeating some of the observations from previous reports (new site specific comments appear in blue in Section 3).

**1. Review of the Developer's Application, Plans, and Drawings (and other related documents)
*Documents reviewed (comments on documents contained in Section 5 below):***

- Civil engineering drawings dated 9-7-2016 (Issued for Review 9-27-17) including Site Plan for Ground Floor and Overall Building).
- Conceptual Drawing Set (22 sheets) prepared by Cube3 included in Site Approval Application dated October, 2016.
- (Various other exhibits included in October, 2016 Site Approval Application).
- Letter from FSL Associates to Morey Danesh dated December 6, 2016
- Letter from Board of Selectmen to MassHousing dated December 8, 2016.
- Civil engineering drawings, undated, Issued for Review 1-25-17, including Site Plan for Ground Floor, Site Plan Overall Building, Grading and Drainage Plan, Utility Plan, Electrical Plan, and Line of Sight Plan.
- Comprehensive Permit Application Submitted to MassHousing dated February, 2017.
- Zoning Board of Appeals presentation dated March 30, 2017 (61 slides).
- Letter from Planning Board to ZBA dated March 30, 2017.
- Letter from Brookline Preservation Commission to ZBA dated April 3, 2017.
- Letter from Cube3 to Brookline Building Department dated April 17, 2017 (code review).

Communications from citizenry:

- Email from Tania Schlatter to Maria Morelli dated November 17, 2016.
- Email from Edward Dumas to Planning Department dated November 23, 2016.
- Letter from Stephen Ault to Board of Selectman dated 11/29/16.
- Email from Mark Rosen to Alison Steinfeld dated December 7, 2016.
- Email from Judith Vanderkay to Alison Steinfeld (and others) dated December 7, 2016'
- Email from Marian Harris to Alison Steinfeld dated December 7, 2016.
- Email from Cathy Kaplan to Alison Steinfeld dated December 7, 2016.
- Email from Steven Pell to Alison Steinfeld dated December 7, 2016.
- Email from Marian Harris to Alison Steinfeld dated December 7, 2016.
- Email from Tracy Bare to Alison Steinfeld dated December 7, 2016.
- Letter from Adi and Gidon Lissai to Whom It May Concern dated December 8, 2016.

- Email from Victoria Longino to Town of Brookline and Residents dated March 21, 2017.
- Email from Fred Bennett to Alison Steinfeld dated April 3, 2017.
- Email from Nancy Bennett to Board of Selectman and Planning Board dated April 5, 2017.
- Letter from Sylvaine Sparrow and Joshua Sparrow to ZBA dated May 15, 2017.
- Letter from Hildy Grossman to Whom It May Concern, undated.
- Letter from Sloat Shaw to Board of Selectman and Planning Board, undated.
- Letter from Linda Pehlke to Alison Steinfeld, undated.
- Letter from Catherine Campbell, not addressed, undated.

(REFERENCE MATERIALS)

- Local 40B Review and Decision Guidelines published by MHP and Edith Netter, November 2005
- Handbook: Approach to Chapter 40B Design Reviews, prepared by The Cecil Group, Inc. for DHCD, MassDevelopment, MassHousig, and MHP, January, 2011

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 at 455 Harvard Street on April 28, 2017. Attending included Cliff Boehmer (Architectural Peer Reviewer), Polly Selkoe, Alison Steinfeld, Peter Bartash (project architect), and Danny Danesh (developer).

Observations at the walkthrough included reviewing building location markings on pavement, review of the setback distance and scale of the neighboring home to the north, condition of retaining walls at the rear and west side of site, conditions on the Thorndike Street (that include an extended curb cut, a fire hydrant, a utility pole, and a street tree that would appear to conflict with proposed construction).

There was discussion of setting up a working session to discuss the proposed project (a date was established, but the meeting was cancelled).

3. Conduct site visit and reconnaissance assessment of surrounding residential and nonresidential areas within one mile of the project site. (This section is predominantly a repeat of the analysis contained in previous Harvard Street Peer Review reports. New comments are highlighted in blue at the end of the section).

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-adequate-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.

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. 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.

The area along Harvard that frames the proposed development includes a gas station immediately across Thorndike Street, followed by single story commercial uses tight to the sidewalk all the way to Naples Road. In the other direction (away from Coolidge Corner), the subject site abuts a parking lot for a small commercial development (that includes a Starbucks), several single story commercial uses up to the sidewalk, then a large parking area open to the sidewalk that serves TJ Maxx.

Directly across Harvard Street is another gas station, followed by a several blocks of single story commercial-to-the-sidewalk on the way towards Coolidge Corner (all the way to the large Temple structure). Going towards Boston on the other side of Harvard, virtually all of the development is set back far from the street, punctuated with parking areas until across from the TJ Maxx.

The site is located in a stretch of Harvard Street that travels NNW after a bend towards the north at JFK Crossing. It is in an L-1.0 district that allows an FAR of 1.0 and a maximum building height of 40 feet.

4. Consult with the Applicant's design team, as appropriate.

No meetings or project-related conversations with the design team have taken place since the site walkthrough on April 28.

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 a ZBA hearing on Monday, May 15.

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 four-story, mixed use building that covers most of the site with building footprint. Included in the program are 17 residential units (12 @ 1-BR, 3 @ 2-BR, 1 @ 3-BR), 13 parking spaces (11 of which are "mechanized") within the building footprint, and 1735 SF of commercial space accessed at the corner of Thorndike and Harvard Streets. The residential entry is from the northwest corner on Harvard Street, and parking is accessed from Thorndike at approximately the midpoint of the building. The building height along Harvard Street is approximately 47 feet, stepping down to 35 feet near the abutting property on Thorndike. The site plan indicates a proposed loading zone on Harvard Street in an area that is an existing curb cut.

Open space on the site is limited to 5-foot setbacks to the Thorndike Street neighbor and the commercial parking area on Harvard Street. This setback is adequate for a concrete sidewalk and a potential narrow planting strip. The property line along Thorndike follows a gentle curve that results in a narrowing of the sidewalk planting strip as one approaches Harvard Street. Interior amenities are limited to the residential entry lobby/mail area, and bicycle storage.

Due to the orientation of the building, and to the fact that it is a corner site open on three sides (including the parking lot to the northwest), three elevations will have very good access to sunlight virtually year-round. The north elevation facing the Thorndike Street neighbor will receive limited morning light during the summer months.

Shadow studies have been included in the application materials, and not unexpectedly, have indicated that most of the impact will be on Harvard Street and the parking area to the north (in the morning hours), and on the Thorndike neighbor and Thorndike Street during the afternoon hours. Shadows are minimized in the summer, and are at a maximum in the winter. While cutting back on the building massing near the neighbor is effective at increasing sky views, there will unquestionably be a significant change of southern exposure for the neighbor given the small scale and large setback of the existing structure at 455.

b. Function, use and adequacy of open space and landscaped areas.

As noted above, open space is very limited, and serves solely for service and egress functions.

c. Use and treatment of natural resources.

This reviewer is not aware of any natural resources that are threatened by the proposed development.

d. Building design, massing and scale in relationship to the surrounding context and topography.

Most of the building, similar to other recently-proposed mixed use structures on Harvard Street, employ a traditional tripartite vertical proportioning system of base, body, and cap. The renderings indicate a strong masonry first floor language, very similar in scale, articulation, and material palette to the existing one-story commercial uses along Harvard Street. The two-story body of the building is clad in brick on the three elevations that are prominently visible, with a smaller-scale-residential type, lapped siding finish where the building faces its neighbor on Thorndike. The top floor is set back from the body along Thorndike and Harvard Street by what appears to be around a foot. Along the parking lot to the north, it isn't clear what the setback may be. The main body of the top floor is set back between approximately 18 to 22 feet from the second and third floors (22'-9" to 27'-3" from the property line) at the abutting property on Thorndike. The northeast egress stair is not set back from the lower levels. Top floor siding materials are called out to be cementitious panels.

The only abutting structure is the neighboring home on Thorndike Street. It is 2.5 stories, with its first floor set approximately 3 feet off of grade, and a tall, dormered hip roof that appears to contain potentially habitable third floor space. There are two bays on the first floor of the structure that face the subject property and are quite close to the property line. The Thorndike Street Elevation contained in the May 15 presentation materials indicates that the ridge height of the home is approximately equal to the height of the flat roof of the proposed new structure (this is possible, given the very tall hip roof and the slope of Thorndike Street upwards as it travels away from Harvard Street).

Generally, as depicted in the project renderings, the Harvard Street elevation is the most successful. Material selection and its deployment is appropriate (for example, using brick both for its permanence and to follow the curved corner), use of awnings to enhance the pedestrian experience, contrasting window pattern at the attic level, etc.). A few recommendations for additional study:

- Where the building rounds the corner, the dimension of the masonry bands between floors is greatly diminished. It seems that the corner should either be recessed for its full height with greater differentiation of materials add articulation, or the masonry bands should continue around the corner at the same dimension as the abutting elevations to ensure a sense of solidity.
- As was noted in the letter from the Planning Board, consideration should be given to "re-locating" the fourth floor cornice to the top of the third floor (most likely retaining a smaller scale cornice at the top of the building).
- Increasing the setback along Harvard Street could increase the usefulness of the sidewalk space (for example, creating enough space for outdoor dining). It would also address Planning Board concern regarding the sight line down Harvard Street.

Two other elevations of the building are very visible when approaching on Harvard Street from either direction. Perhaps the most prominent elevation is seen when approaching the site from Boston. This elevation requires the most additional study, as it contains a variety of elements that currently are “dis-associated”, creating a lack of coherence. Included in the visible elements are service entries, the end of the heavy commercial band, a truncated top floor, an exterior balcony, rooftop mechanical equipment, and a large flat masonry face (with code limitations on percentage of allowable openings). It is also possible that there may be penetrations introduced for mechanical equipment that have not been determined at this point. While it isn’t possible to know the future of the parking area along this elevation, for now, this will be the first major structure encountered in Brookline when entering the town from Harvard Avenue, which makes it critical to resolve this perspective of the proposed project. Note that relative to this elevation, the Planning Board has recommended a deeper setback to allow a vegetative buffer to screen the view (which could be combined with this reviewer’s comments about improving the coherence and visual interest of the façade). Given intense western solar exposure, perhaps sun shading should be considered.

When approaching from Coolidge Corner, because of the open-to-corner gas station next to the Daily Catch, most of the Thorndike Street elevation is visible (this may be somewhat misrepresented in the May 15 presentation materials that appear to compress the space occupied by the gas station). Some considerations for this elevation include:

- While window sizes and proportions are suitable, the elevation lacks articulation and is very stark, particularly when contrasted with the smaller scale residential neighbors on Thorndike. More movement, increased top floor setback, brick detailing, etc. could greatly improve the elevation.
- Plainness of the elevation is exacerbated by the minimal setback on Thorndike that precludes any “softening” with landscape materials. Sidewalk is very cramped (Planning Board has recommended increasing the setback to align with the average setback of the homes on Thorndike).
- Use of bays above ground level may be way to enhance the pedestrian experience and not lose as much square footage in units above.
- It is not clear if a garage door is proposed to block pedestrian views into the parking garage (as well as noise that may be generated by the automated parking system).
- Not clear what function/aesthetics of metal mesh infill panels are. Not optimal for building elevation from pedestrian perspective. Also a potential noise problem if open to outdoors (which seems unnecessary, given that it is likely that garage will be mechanically ventilated).

The elevation that is mostly screened from public view faces the neighboring structure on Thorndike Street. The intent of the proposed massing is to drop the scale of the building down to three stories for most of the footprint where it is closest to the neighbor, and then increase to the full four story structure closer to Harvard Street. While this strategy makes sense as far as making the transition from the commercial zone to the existing residential area, this reviewer believes several improvements could be made:

- As was recommended by the Planning Board, increasing the setback at the ground level will increase the view of the sky from the neighboring home.
- At a minimum, setback should be adequate for an effective vegetative buffer (Planning Board recommends setting back enough for creation of usable open space for the future residents of 455).
- Rear stairwell should be integrated into the main body of the building, as opposed to the “free standing” approach that is currently depicted (as it is the three story façade closest to the neighbors that controls the view to the sky, the setback of the fourth level is adequate).
- Placement of fenestration in the new units should take existing window locations in the neighboring existing home into consideration in order to maximize privacy.
- Material change from brick to lap siding is appropriate, but care should be taken to provide a suitable level of detailing to create an attractive façade consistent with the homes on Thorndike.

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

See comments above.

f. Pedestrian and vehicular circulation

As noted above, vehicular entry to the building is off of Thorndike Street. At that point, Thorndike is a two-way street, with parking allowed on the side opposite the subject site. Potential issues related to ensuring pedestrian safety at the garage entry, curb cut(s), proposed loading area, noise impact of parking system, parking ratio, etc. are under consideration by a different peer reviewer.

Pedestrian access to the building appears to be limited to the primary residential entry on the northwest corner on Harvard Street, as well as egress along the Thorndike street abutting property line. Various other service doors open up onto the north and east perimeters of the building within a five-foot setback. Generally speaking, as noted elsewhere, the pedestrian experience would be enhanced with increased setbacks on Thorndike and Harvard Street.

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

The current site is fully occupied by a commercial use, including parking directly on Harvard Street, a small paved dining area on Harvard, and paving fully covering the remainder of the open space. The proposed structure eliminates visible parking and much of the existing large curb cuts onto Harvard Street and Thorndike. The proposed mixed use extends active commercial use along Harvard.

It appears that an existing street tree will have to be removed to accommodate the new structure (as well as a fire hydrant and a utility pole). It does not appear that there are any other existing trees on the site. It is not clear if there are any trees proposed on the new plan (see comments elsewhere about increasing areas dedicated to landscape plantings).

h. Exterior materials

Indicated on elevations. Primarily brick, other "masonry" at first floor, cementitious panels, and storefront.

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.

j. Exterior lighting

Materials include a lighting plan indicating a concentration of light along Harvard Street and part way up Thorndike. Some additional perimeter lighting is shown along the abutting parking lot elevation and along Thorndike neighboring site. It is not discernable what lighting types are proposed.

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

No landscape plan provided with revised scheme.

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

It does not appear that there is information in the application that expresses the developer's desire to design and construct to a third-party-verifiable level.

m. Any other design-related considerations identified by the consultant in the course of its review

- Floor plans in submission include relatively detailed "conceptual" unit plans. It seems likely that the units are able to conformance with accessibility codes. Note that the building has fewer than 20 rental units, which exempts it from providing Group 2 ("fully accessible") units. All units are required to conform with Group 1 unit requirements.
- How will trash be handled on the site?
- Rooftop elevator extension, penthouses, mechanical equipment screening, etc. are minimally depicted in the submitted drawings. These will likely be very visible, and should be detailed.
- A Construction Management Plan should be submitted for review.
- Will a ground-mounted transformer be required on the site?

n. Techniques to mitigate visual impact

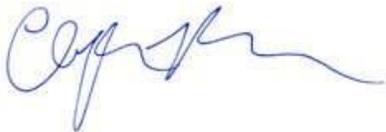
- (see design-related comments above related to landscape buffering)
- While the first floor to second floor height may be dictated by type of parking and structural reasons, can the 11'-6" top floor to top of roof height be diminished?
- As noted above, serious consideration should be given to increasing the setback from the neighboring structure on Thorndike Street.
- Setback along Thorndike, at least at the first floor level, should be increased.
- Replacement/provision of additional street trees should be considered.

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. As this report is rather broad-ranging, to help focus the discussion with the ZBA (at the risk of being repetitious), I'd like to highlight the issues of highest importance to this reviewer:

- More detail and articulation of primary building elevations, particularly Thorndike Street and the exposed north-facing elevation fronting the adjacent parking lot (treating elevations as important part of the public realm). Various strategies are outlined above.
- Details of several specific elevation components (garage door, metal screening, "masonry" first floor elements, etc.).
- Increased setback on Thorndike Street to tie building into residential neighborhood and enhance the pedestrian experience.
- Increased ground level setback to neighbor on Thorndike Street (however, this reviewer does not believe that the creation of usable outdoor space in that location is necessary or beneficial).
- Landscape plan that includes appropriate level of screening, location of street tree(s), placement of transformer (if required), etc.
- Consideration of increasing usable sidewalk space on Harvard (most likely increased setback).
- Details of screening strategy of visible mechanical equipment on roof.
- Integration of rear stairwell into main body of building.
- Careful design of elevation facing Thorndike neighbor (placement of windows, details of buffer, architectural detailing).
- Ensure that floor to floor height is minimized.

Sincerely,



Clifford Boehmer, AIA