

**From:** Tom Schlatter [<mailto:tom@tomschlatter.com>]  
**Sent:** Monday, May 15, 2017 1:54 PM  
**To:** Alison Steinfeld  
**Cc:** Tania Schlatter  
**Subject:** 455 Harvard proposed 40B comment

Dear Ms. Steinfeld and Brookline Zoning Board,

I am writing today to provide my comments on the proposed 40B construction at 455 Harvard St. I am a 16 year resident of 121 Thorndike St. My wife Tania has already provided separate comments on 11/17/2016.

Let me begin by saying that I do believe that the owner of the property does have a right to use the property in a variety of ways, in accordance with the law and community standards. The next use of the property may differ from how it is today in function, style, and size. I have no issue with this in general, however I do feel that the current proposal for 455 Harvard St. is excessive in a number of ways and goes too far in pushing the boundaries of what fits and serves the neighborhood and community. My concern is both for the building being approved for 455 Harvard St. and for the next building to push the boundaries of what fits and serves the community using it as a precedent.

My comments are with regards to the applicant's presentation and revised parking plan dated 5/11/17 on the town's web site at <http://www.brooklinema.gov/1350/455-Harvard-40B>.

On slide 7, the presentation describes "Comparable structures". While the structures shown are comparable in the sense of being multi-story and for the most part flat roofed masonry buildings, I would like to disregard 420 Harvard St as it is not built and thus does not serve a precedent, and the final structure at 420 Harvard St. is subject to change. Primarily I would like to note that most of these buildings are significantly set back from all fronted sidewalks, and all of them are set back from sidewalks not abutting Harvard St on predominantly residential streets. There are commercial buildings with zero setbacks facing residential streets in the neighborhood, but these are single story buildings, not buildings exceeding the zoned height limits of their lot.

On slide 19 the applicant implies that the height of the building is only slightly higher than other buildings in the neighborhood. However, of the buildings with their height labeled on the slide, no other building over 18' tall has a flat roof. A flat roofed building shades the surrounding area more than a pitched roof building and significantly increases the massing of the building for a given height. The design attempts to address this with a minor stepback on 3 sides of the 4th floor, a more significant stepback for the rear side of the 4th floor, and a change in materials for the 4th floor, but I feel these are insufficient to overcome how out of balance with the surrounding structures that the proposed structure is.

Individually the building height, lack of setback, and flat roof can all be talked about in ways that seem in line with comparable properties, but the combination of these factors in a single structure goes well beyond what fits with the character, appearance, and feel of the neighborhood.

The setback from the property line at 78 Thorndike St. seems insufficient. There are other similar configurations of abutting properties and narrow setbacks between buildings in the neighborhood, but most of these appear to be between buildings built at approximately the same time, not 100 years later. The proposed setback, building height including consideration for the 4th floor stepback, and dimensions of the rear wall of the proposed 455 Harvard St. will present the residents of that building with an imposing, towering brick wall, block sunlight and views of the sky, increase heating costs, and impact the property's value.

The applicant has proposed altering the curb cuts and vehicle access to the property, concentrating access on Thorndike St. Given the very limited setback proposed there, I am concerned about poor visibility for exiting vehicles, pedestrian safety, increased traffic, and contention on Thorndike St. I am especially concerned about the prospect of cars backing out of the proposed vehicle access to 455 Harvard St - as a Thorndike St. resident I am very conscious of the challenges of backing up across the sidewalk even with much better visibility than what is planned for 455 Harvard St. I would like the town to require some form of active visual warning system for exiting vehicles and signage prohibiting backing out of the building, and to reiterate my concern that the street-level setback proposed is insufficient.

The parking stacker proposed by the applicant seems like a forward-looking solution to the limited parking options available in the range of designs possible on the lot, though I am concerned about the potential noise of the system in operation. I would like the town to require the property owner to provide some attestation that they will maintain the

stacking system in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations including periodic maintenance, that they will retain a repair service with a defined response time to address issues with the stacking system as they arise, and that noise issues that may come up after the system has been installed - whether at time of installation or after being in operation for some time - are dealt with promptly. I am not experienced with the maintenance of mechanical systems but would think a response time somewhere between 4 and 8 hours 7 days a week should be available. I would like these conditions to transfer with the ownership of the building.

I am concerned about the lack of setback on Harvard St. impeding visibility for cars that need to cross or enter Harvard St. from Thorndike St. If the building is built as proposed, it will make an already challenging intersection even more difficult for cars coming from Thorndike St. to navigate. I am concerned that any issues coming from construction on the property will need to be addressed by the town in the future when reduced safety is seen at the intersection, and some traffic calming system will need to be designed and implemented.

Sincerely,  
Tom Schlatter  
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