

October 2, 2017

To the Brookline Zoning Board of Appeals  
via e-mail to Maria Morelli

Dear members of the ZBA,

We are writing in response to the revised building plans that the Babcock Place project team submitted to the Town last week. At first glance, you may conclude that the project team has addressed the requests made by you and peer reviewers. The architectural style is much improved, the problematic loading zone has been removed, the garage entrance has been moved to the side, the pedestrian entrance has more prominence, the 5<sup>th</sup> floor has been stepped back in the rear, the rear setback has been expanded and the parking ratio has improved.

We acknowledge that the building aesthetics are much improved, yet **the negative impact of the project's scale and massing on abutters and the neighborhood has not been mitigated.**

The 5<sup>th</sup> floor has been stepped back only on one side of the property and in exchange for that, the building now has a new deck and 20 air conditioning units on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor roof. Portions of the building's rear setback have been expanded by about 4-6 feet, but a 46-foot stretch of that wall of the building still sits only 10 feet from the property line. The building's front wall now sits 1-2 feet *closer* to the street. Setbacks on the north side have also *decreased* and the building now sits as much as 7-feet closer to the homes on that side of the building. The height of the project has *increased* by 2 feet to 58 feet in total and the footprint of the building has barely shrunk.

The project team is presenting these revised project dimensions despite the Planning Board's recommendations for 20-foot front and rear setbacks and stepping back the top floor on all sides. Additionally, the design peer reviewer, Cliff Boehmer, explained the importance of improving the ratio between height and setback. He stated "...my last comments are really, which is eliminate or significantly decrease the size of the top floor" and "...increasing all of the setbacks I think is important to really make this viable and to really have a chance of having a border with the neighbors that is respectful" (pg. 34 of the August 23 transcript).

These new setbacks will not meaningfully preserve the trees on or around the site, preserve the screen provided by those trees, or address the noise and air quality concerns which have been raised. The addition of air conditioners and a roof deck on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor roof at the rear of the building and 39 parking lifts will only exacerbate the noise and privacy impacts. The front setbacks do not bring the building in line with the majority of homes and apartment buildings on Babcock Street. A taller height, combined with minimal setbacks do not mitigate the effect of the massing of this building on pedestrians, abutters and the neighborhood in general. The parking ratio has improved by using 39 parking lifts which will generate additional noise.

You have sought the significant expertise of the Town's Planning Board, department heads, and outside peer reviewers as you review this project. They have responded with thoughtfully-considered recommendations about the building itself and its relation to this particular neighborhood. We hope that you will incorporate their advice and ensure this project is revised again (and again, if necessary) until the resulting building is one that truly respects the neighborhood as it adds much-needed affordable housing.

Sincerely,

Carrie & Guy Staff  
123 Stedman St.  
Brookline