

Ashley Clark

Subject: FW: 134-138 Babcock Place: Zoning Board of Appeals Loses Sight of Setbacks

From: J R Anderson [<mailto:andersonwinterbass@gmail.com>]

Sent: Sunday, October 22, 2017 6:14 PM

To: Maria Morelli

Cc: Polly Selkoe

Subject: 134-138 Babcock Place: Zoning Board of Appeals Loses Sight of Setbacks

Kindly forward to all ZBA members for review.

Dear Chairman Geller & Members of the Brookline Zoning Board of Appeals:

I am writing to express deep concern about the startling and unanticipated retreat from your August 23rd call for specific and respectful building setbacks during the Babcock Place public hearing on October 2nd, 2017.

On August 23rd, each of you, along with the Town's architectural consultant (Mr. Clifford Boehmer) and project coordinator, Ms. Maria Morelli, was either directly or indirectly quoted requesting increased setbacks for the massive and overbearing proposal known as 134-138 Babcock Place. (Page numbers refer to meeting transcript.)

Mr. Boehmer: "...And similarly, the increasing of all of the setbacks I think is important to really make this viable and really have a chance of having a border with the neighbors that is respectful." (p 34)

Ms. Morelli: "I will summarize just briefly what those issues are. Size and massing of the building are excessive, insufficient front and rear yard setbacks. I think, Mr. Geller, you said that you were less concerned with the height and more concerned with the massing and setbacks. The other ZBA members are concerned overall with massing and setbacks and height. (pp15-16)

Mr. Zuroff: "...I find the design to be incongruous with the residential character of the neighborhood...I also support Kate's original recommendation that there be further additional setbacks and reduction in the number of units...So I'd like it to be smaller and shorter...I'd like to see less units so that the building mass is appropriately reduced...It's not portrayed, necessarily, in the drawings, but that building looms over those yards. And also, because it's so close to the lot line, as presented, threatens with drainage and air circulation and shading issues that I'm hoping that the developer will address...." (pp106-7)

Mr. Hussey: "And I agree in general with what the architectural peer review has elaborated on: reducing the top floor or eliminating the top floor, increasing most of the setbacks." (p107)

Ms. Poverman: "And I reiterate that I think that the building has to have much better, larger setbacks, at least 20 feet, maybe even more, is necessary to prevent harm to abutters. And, you know, a final comment is one which we all know and have gone over, is that you can't have a building that takes up basically every single inch of the lot. The intensity of that use is just too much and it's not supportable, even under 40B. So make it smaller." (p109)

By comparison, on October 2nd, Mr. Geller commented that setbacks would be reconsidered after topographical survey and the front facade should be flush with its neighbor at 120 Babcock. Mr. Zuroff reiterated the need for a shorter building with larger setbacks. But only Ms. Poverman emphasized the impact that a 5-story building without substantially increased setbacks would have on the adjacent community. And I am writing, therefore, to

underscore my position that the benefits of moving to a substantially smaller footprint for Babcock Place are too numerous to ignore:

- 1) **Reduced Babcock Street traffic/delivery congestion and noise;**
- 2) **Improved safety for neighborhood children, pedestrians, cyclists & motorists;**
- 3) **Corridors of light and air for abutters, neighbors and pedestrians on Babcock, Freeman and Stedman Streets;**
- 4) **Diminished shadows to the adjacent park on Freeman Street;** (NB None of the developer's shadow studies went past 3pm. The major shadow impact on Freeman park enthusiasts in summer will be from 4pm to 9pm.)
- 5) **Improved prospects for adjacent tree/canopy survival;**
- 6) **Reduced risk to Stedman abutters' hillside erosion and foundation integrity;**
- 7) **Diminished load stress on the rear of 2 concrete slab garages set into the hillside and founded over peat within 10 feet of the project's west border; and**
- 8) **Demonstration of respect for abutters' privacy.**

We all know that the proposed building is way too big. But your recent shift in tone and focus away from setbacks and toward just the modification of the 5th story makes it feel like the Board is preparing--after a few sessions of commiseration with neighbors--to approve a monster with a few tweaks up top.

To reiterate: I support and welcome affordable housing. But I ask you now to remember what you said about setbacks and do the right thing. Please help us all get to "yes" on a significantly smaller project design for 134-138 Babcock Place--a design that creates a positive legacy that the developer, Town and citizens of Brookline can be proud of--a building that starts by respecting its neighbors.

Respectfully and with thanks for your consideration and good work,

John Robert Anderson, MD
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