



D A V I S
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January 24, 2018

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

RE: Babcock Place
"Final" Architectural Peer Review Report

Dear Alison:

I'm writing to provide you with a final Peer Review Report in accordance with the Urban Design Peer Review Scope of Work document for 134-138 Babcock Street that was part of my agreement with the Town. I expect to present this report to the ZBA on Wednesday, January 17, 2018.

1. Review of the Developer's Application, Plans, and Drawings

As you know, my services related to this project reach back to July of 2017. Since that time, I have reviewed numerous generations of drawings, technical reports, peer reviews of technical reports, memos from various town boards and departments, as well as a multitude of letters, memos, and emails from the public. I have delivered presentations to the ZBA on August 23, October 2, and November 27. Working sessions/staff meetings with the developer and Planning staff have occurred on September 7, September 26, October 31, November 30, and January 9. Just over the last week, we have received and reviewed numerous additional documents submitted by the proponent, as well as additional public comment.

In my August and October presentations I could only estimate that the grade at the rear (west) of the project site declines about six to ten feet onto abutters' rear yards. At the October 2 hearing, I reiterated the importance of having surveys of the grade beyond the project site to accurately assess scale and impact. It was only at the October 31 staff meeting, relatively late in the process, that I received survey information indicating the topography of the abutting properties, which indeed indicates that the slope is lower than estimated or rendered in the 3D model.

Given this long engagement with the proposed project, I am limiting this "final" report to the exhibits that I have reviewed since my November 27 presentation. These include:

- Memorandum to Sam Slater from Maria Morelli summarizing November 30 staff meeting.
- Letter to ZBA with arborist review attached from Hill Law dated November 24, 2017.
- Memorandum to Alison Steinfeld from Annie Blair and Tom Brady dated December 5, 2017, reviewing Babcock Landscape Plan dated 11/17/2017 and other related documents.
- Memorandum to Alison Steinfeld from Annie Blair and Tom Brady dated December 7, 2017, reviewing revised Hammer + Walsh landscape plan, details, and plant images.
- Email from Peter Bartash to Maria Morelli dated December 11, 2017, regarding clarification of location of a building section on site.
- Email to Geoff Engler from Maria Morelli dated December 12, 2017 regarding setbacks, tree protection, etc.
- Presentation to the ZBA, December 13, 2017 set of drawings issued by Cube 3.
- Stamped drawing set dated 13 December 2017 issued by Cube 3 (total of 13 sheets).

- Memorandum to James Fitzgerald from Arthur Stadig (Walker Consultants) dated December 14, 2017 regarding Peer Review of Parking, 12-13 Concept Design.
- Landscape Plan L101 (undated) produced by Hammer + Walsh.
- Landscape Details L201 (undated) produced by Hammer + Walsh.
- Plant Images L202 (undated) produced by Hammer + Walsh.
- Missouri Botanical Garden descriptions of proposed landscape materials indicated on Landscape Plan.
- Memorandum to Alison Steinfeld and Maria Morelli from Environmental Partners dated January 5, 2018 regarding Response to Peer Review Comments.
- Excavation support and open cut diagrams dated 1.09.18 prepared by McPhail Associates.
- Babcock Place Trash Narrative/Recycling Program, Trash Room Plan dated 1/12/18, trash compactor and bin catalog cuts.
- Babcock Place Massing Review & Floor Plans 1/16/18 prepared by Cube 3.
- Babcock Place Tree Protection Plan, Landscape Plan Assessment dated January 16, 2018 prepared by Howard Gaffin.
- Babcock Place C-100, C-200, and C-300 dated 17 January 17 2018 prepared by J.F. Hennessy Co.
- Babcock Place Landscape Plans L 101, L 201, L 202 dated 17 January 2018 prepared by Hammer + Walsh.
- Letter To Whom It May Concern from Town of Brookline Fire Department dated January 17, 2018.
- Memo to Alison Steinfeld from Tom Brady dated January 17, 2018.
- Letter to Chairperson Geller and ZBA from Michael Yanovitch dated January 17, 2018.
- Garage, driveway, and Babcock Street turning radii diagrams prepared by VAI, undated.

Communications from citizenry:

- Letter to ZBA dated November 27, 2018 (sic) from Susan Roberts regarding project impact.
- Email to Maria Morelli from Kevin Taback dated November 27, 2017 regarding project impact.
- Email to Maria Morelli from Natalie Heinrich dated November 27, 2017 regarding project impact.
- Email to Maria Morelli from Steven Paul dated November 27, 2017 regarding project impact.
- Email to Maria Morelli from Hailong Chang dated November 27, 2017 regarding project impact.
- Email to Maria Morelli from Rhoda Goodwin dated November 27, 2017 regarding project impact.
- Email to Maria Morelli from Alicia Daloia dated November 27, 2017 regarding project impact.
- Email to Maria Morelli from Carol Kort dated November 27, 2017 regarding project impact.
- Email to Maria Morelli from Cathy Kaplan dated November 27, 2017 regarding project impact.
- Email to Maria Morelli from Cynthia Baron dated November 27, 2017 regarding project impact.
- Email to Maria Morelli from David Lourie dated November 27, 2017 regarding project impact.
- Email to Maria Morelli from Judith Vanderkay dated November 27, 2017 regarding project impact.
- Email to Maria Morelli from Leo Mannion dated November 27, 2017 regarding project impact.
- Email to Alison Steinfeld from Mark Rosen dated November 27, 2017 regarding project impact.
- Email to Maria Morelli from Ron Vin dated November 27, 2017 regarding project impact.
- Email to Maria Morelli from Alisha Nanda dated November 27, 2017 regarding project impact.
- Email to Maria Morelli from Diana Spiegel dated November 27, 2017 regarding project impact.
- Email to Maria Morelli from Kalman Zabarsky dated November 27, 2017 regarding project impact.
- Email to Maria Morelli from Marc Foster dated November 27, 2017 regarding project impact.
- Email to Maria Morelli from Trudy Golden dated November 27, 2017 regarding project impact.
- Email to Maria Morelli from Sue Tamber Hausman dated November 27, 2017 regarding project impact.
- Letter to Brookline ZBA from Ainat and Larry Rogel dated November 27, 2017 regarding project impact.
- Email to Maria Morelli from Ellen Perrin dated November 30, 2017 regarding project impact.
- Letter to Maria Morelli from Gina Crandell dated December 1, 2017 regarding project planting plan.
- Letter to Maria Morelli and ZBA members dated December 1, 2017 from Gina Crandell regarding proposed landscaping at 134-138 Babcock.
- Email to Maria Morelli from J.R. Anderson dated December 10, 2017 regarding project impact.
- Email to Maria Morelli from James Perrin dated December 10, 2017 regarding project impact.
- Letter to Maria Morelli from Gina Crandell dated December 12, 2017 regarding project impact.

- Email to Maria Morelli from Jane Gilman dated December 12, 2017 regarding project impact.
- Email to Maria Morelli from Marilyn Daniels dated December 12, 2017 regarding project impact.
- Email to Maria Morelli from Sue Tamber Hausman dated December 14, 2017 regarding project impact.
- Letter to Maria Morelli from Linda Olson Pehlke (undated) regarding project impact.
- Email to Maria Morelli from Maria Zucker dated January 15, 2018 regarding project impact.
- Email to Maria Morelli from Debbie and Paul Parker-Johnson dated January 16, 2018 regarding project impact.
- Email to Maria Morelli from Ruth Lim dated January 16, 2017 regarding project impact.
- Letter to Maria Morelli and ZBA from Gina Crandell dated January 16, 2018 regarding project impact.
- Email to Maria Morelli from Susan Roberts dated January 17, 2018 regarding project impact.
- Letter to Maria Morelli and ZBA from Gina Crandell dated January 19, 2018 regarding project impact.

(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, MassHousing, and MHP, January, 2011

2. Initial Meeting at the site with the Developer’s Design team and Representative of the Town

As noted above, numerous meetings have occurred with Developer’s Design team and Town Representatives.

3. Conduct site visit and reconnaissance assessment of surrounding residential and nonresidential areas within one mile of the project site.

Immediate neighborhood context has been discussed in detail at ZBA presentations (however, not out as far as one mile of the project site). Generally speaking, the proposed development would represent an extension of a zone of larger scale multi-family buildings into a two-family district that proceeds sporadically from Harvard Street along Babcock Street from the south. Continuing north on Babcock Street towards Commonwealth Avenue, a larger proportion of the structures are wood-frame, smaller scale homes on individual lots. As one approaches Commonwealth, larger scale masonry structures prevail. To the west and northeast, generally all homes are wood-frame homes on their own lots. Towards the southeast, past Stetson Street, building density increases, with many areas of continuous street wall residential development.

The nearby context that is the best fit “scale-wise” for the proposed development is immediately across the street, where the new structure would provide an end wall to the small triangular park that is partially framed by the 3.5 story pair of buildings on Freeman Street. And of course, the immediate neighbor to the south is of a similar scale and relationship to Babcock Street.

Most negative impact would be experienced by the neighbor immediately to the north on Babcock, followed by the Stedman Street homes to the west, and then the Manchester neighbors to the north. Accordingly, most of this peer reviewer’s analysis of “architectural impact” of the proposed project has been focused on mitigation of impact to the north and west. The large structure to the south (120 Babcock) is under the same ownership as the proposed project, and most discussion related to that building has been related to finding ways to “pair it” with the new structure in order to create a more coherent streetscape.

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

See above comments regarding multiple meetings with the design team.

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:

See above comments regarding previous presentations to ZBA.

- 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 current proposal is to build a single building that varies in apparent height from 5 stories on the Babcock Street elevation, to 3 stories-plus-partially-exposed-basement on the elevation facing Stedman Street. Because of the situation and form of the structure, the “rear” elevation (in the sense that it is the least visible) is arguably the south elevation that faces the structure at 120 Babcock under the same ownership.

Babcock Public Realm: There is only one true street elevation, which is broken into two planes to accommodate a side entry on the south side of the structure. In the current drawings dated 1/16/18, the garage door has been angled back into the garage space to improve the ability for vehicles to enter and leave simultaneously without interfering with each other. As recommended, the current version of the site plan has aligned the Babcock Street setback of the primary body of the structure with 120 Babcock. A bay window that extends across the second, third, and fourth floor extends past the common setback, as does a small entry roof above the main lobby entry. It is this reviewer’s belief that the current design (including overall façade height and articulation, materials, fenestration, setback, etc.) effectively ties this building into the Babcock streetscape.

Stedman Public Realm:

Recommendations 12/13/2017 plans: My initial conclusion after reviewing the December 13, 2017 drawings was that increasing setbacks of floors 2, 3, and 4 about 5 feet along the western elevation and the northern most end of the “ell” would make an improvement to the sense of the scale of the new structure and to the view of the open sky for the Stedman neighbors. There would also be a resultant diminution of shadow impact. In addition, more space would be provided for crown growth on new and existing trees. The same improvements would hold for the more distant neighbors to the north, but to a lesser degree given that they are further away from the new building and there is less grade change towards the north (see diagrams attached to this letter).

Having said that, the parking level plan is relatively immutable at this point given parking space and aisle dimensional requirements combined with maintaining a reasonable parking ratio. Moving the upper levels independently from the parking level could potentially create more construction expense, as a line of columns must be introduced to support the upper levels, where previously that load was carried by the foundation wall (some form of which still would need to be built as a retaining wall that defines the parking level). There is some expense associated with the requirement to roof over the extension of the parking level beyond the unit exterior walls above.

Assessment of 1/16/2018 plans: In response to this reviewer’s recommendation above, the applicant eliminated the bump out at the rear façade of the fourth floor. Although this is not the reduction this reviewer asked for, the results do effectively mitigate impacts, and are satisfactory. Overall, efforts have been made on the other visible facades to break down the scale of the building through diminution of height, step backs, bay windows, top floor “roofscape”, strong horizontal trim lines, change of materials and colors, landscape buffers, etc. (all of which have been discussed at multiple ZBA hearings). This iteration of the building has significantly increased the top floor setback, as well as increasing the Stedman side setback from the property line to facilitate more effective buffering options (including perhaps most importantly, better ensuring preservation of existing trees on neighboring sites).

In the 1/16/18 drawings, the fourth floor roof edge has been pulled back in the area of the “bump out” so that the entire west façade of the fourth floor is set back about 20 feet. About 60% of the west façade of the second and third floors are also set back 20 to 21 feet. This modification at the fourth floor decreases the shadow impact on the Stedman neighbors and increases view of the sky to the east. The fifth floor is set back about 56-59 feet, which keeps it outside of the sight line of abutters at 117-119 Stedman, as shown on the site section study. In the December 13 plans the fifth floor set back was about 65 feet. To regain some of the eliminated square footage from the fourth floor in this new iteration, the fifth floor has expanded to the west about eight feet; however, this shift will not increase shadow or intrude on the abutters’ view of sky.

All on-site parking is at street level, contained within the first floor of the building. Because of grades rising towards the west, the parking level is approximately two-thirds underground at the façade facing Stedman, which contributes to the overall three-story (not five-story) volume visible from Stedman.

Manchester Public Realm: The setback to the north ranges from 20 feet at the Babcock end and narrows to about five feet at the pinch point where the slope onto abutting yard at the north is lower than that than of the project site (but not as sharp of a decline as at Stedman side). In addition, there is about 75 feet between the rear facade at 12 Manchester and the north façade of the three-story “ell”. That distance in combination the relatively more gradual decline means the abutters closest to the “ell” at the north perceive a three-story volume.

Shadows, Solar Access, Protection of Trees: Since October 31, I have been able to review accurate surveys of the grades and site sections that indicate distances between buildings and elevations beyond the project site to better understand the perceived scale of the proposed structure and solar impact to the neighbors to the north and west. Generally, the orientation of the building will provide good access to morning and afternoon direct sunlight for its residents. Access to southern light is limited by the neighboring structure. The largest percentage of units are primarily north facing.

Shadow studies of all iterations of design have been included in the design packages (with the exception of the 1/16/18 package) and reviewed by this peer reviewer. The most heavily impacted building is the single family home directly to the north and not unexpectedly, on the Stedman properties to the west. To a lesser degree, shadows impact at least one neighbor on Manchester Road. It should be noted that on most dates and times, shadows fall on exterior spaces, not directly on neighboring structures. The shadows from the current iteration of the building on the Stedman neighbors is cast from the lowest part of the building closest to the property line. That is to say, the significant step-back of the top floor essentially eliminates shadow impact to the Stedman neighbors from that level. This is not the case with neighbors to the north, where shadow impact for most times of the day is generated from the fifth floor of the proposed structure.

As noted above, the current version of the plans does pull back the fourth floor level in the area of the “bump out” to between 20 and 21 feet, which aligns with about 60% of the footprint below. While not the scale of change initially recommended to the developer, now that we have been able to review the reports of test pits to review the root structures of existing trees, combined with revised geo-technical recommendations for excavation method and the tree protection plan/review of proposed landscape plan, this reviewer has a higher degree of confidence that an effective planted buffer can be maintained along the west elevation of the building. This point, along with the proposed revised set back on the fourth level, provides the degree of mitigation of the massing that this reviewer has been pushing for. And as far as the perception of scale from the neighbors, it is important to note that in the current design, the elevations that are closest to the Stedman and Manchester neighbors, are essentially of the same scale as a three story building with an elevated basement level.

There would be new afternoon shadows cast on Babcock Street throughout the year, the length of which depends upon the precise time of day and season. This is a concern that has been expressed by some residents of the neighborhood. In the opinion of this reviewer, there are compensating positive attributes associated with the creation of an end wall to the landscaped park across the street, a more coherent pedestrian experience, and a likely lessening of the number and frequency of cars crossing the sidewalk along Babcock to access the new use compared with existing conditions on the site.

Parking: The parking ratio has been increased through the use of a parking stacker system (as well as cutting back on the number of units).

Open Space: There is very little, if any, usable open space on the site (all open space is proposed to be planted to buffer the project from its neighbors). Interior amenities appear to be limited to the residential entry lobby/mail area, elevator lobby, and some undesignated storage space. No bicycle storage is indicated on plans.

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

As noted above, open space is very limited, and serves solely for landscape materials.

c. Use and treatment of natural resources.

Other than the loss of a large number of significant trees that could be impacted by the proposed development, this reviewer is not aware of any natural resources that are threatened.

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

This is discussed in 5a above. Since the original proposal, the developer has recognized the importance of working with the appearance of all facades of the structure, and has employed various strategies to mitigate the impact of the scale of the building (which is much greater than all structures immediately to the north and west), as well as to tie the building's language into something that is more typical for medium sized roadway residential development in Brookline. Traditional tri-partite elevations, combined with deployment of traditional materials that are compatible with the structures (or street) they are facing, are the most important distinguishing elements of the façade designs.

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

As noted above, façade designs, which vary from elevation to elevation, are intended to relate to the types of structures (or street) that they face.

f. Pedestrian and vehicular circulation

Vehicular entry to the building in all iterations except the original design is off of Babcock Street, but into a garage door that is oriented perpendicular to the street. The issue that was identified with turning radii in and out of the garage has reportedly been addressed by angling the garage door into the garage space. This reviewer made a recommendation to the developer to consider a loading area on the south side of the building (see diagram attached to this letter). Residents enter the building through a lobby facing Babcock Street, or through a stair or elevator from the parking level.

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

The building takes up a very large percentage of available site area, and as such, its development necessitates removal of all existing tree cover. Preservation of trees that are growing on neighboring sites has been an ongoing concern, and attempts to address that is evident in the current plan that increases the building setback on the Stedman Street side (as well as the new foundation excavation concepts and tree protection plans).

h. Exterior materials

Indicated on elevations. Appear to be compatible with existing materials on nearby structures.

i. Energy efficiency

No information available for review. Brookline has adopted the energy Stretch Code, which will ensure a relatively higher level of efficiency, at least from an operating perspective.

j. Exterior lighting

No information available for review.

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

Current landscape plans that were provided with revised scheme have been reviewed by the Town's Tree Warden and Landscape Architect. While their concerns were mitigated with their review of the revised landscape plans, there may be remaining concern relative to potentially inadequate sunlight to sustain the proposed landscaping materials.

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

No information available at this time, however, there is nothing in the proposed design that would preclude certification under several third party certification systems.

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

- Unit plans in submission are "conceptual", and only block out square footages necessary for different unit types. It seems likely that the units are able to conform with accessibility codes. Applicant should provide unit layouts, including proposed locations for Group 2 units.
- This reviewer has not seen peer review comments on proposed method for dealing with trash disposal (although space is designated on the entry level for a compactor and bins). It is understood that Public Health department will review adequacy of trash room dimensions.
- Rooftop elevator extension, penthouses (or access hatches), mechanical equipment screening, etc. are minimally depicted in the submitted drawings. These may be visible, most likely from the park across the Babcock Street.
- A Construction Management Plan should be submitted for review.
- Consideration should be given to providing a pit for the transformer, as opposed to the ground-mounted type shown in the drawings.
- Space should be allotted for bike storage (zoning is 1:5 ratio, bike spaces to units). Brookline requirements are significantly less stringent than surrounding communities that have strong advocacy for cyclists. The proponent should consider providing a parking ratio more in line with those cities.

n. Techniques to mitigate visual impact

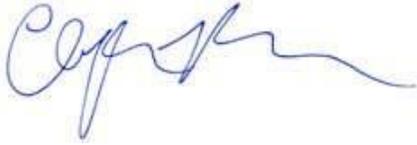
- Assurances that existing significant trees on abutting properties can be preserved are critical to an effective buffering plan.
- Can the floor to floor height be diminished?

While the developer has made very good progress in addressing concerns expressed by this peer reviewer, planning staff comments, technical reports, etc., I'd like to highlight some remaining issues and opportunities of highest importance to this reviewer:

- Provision of details of several specific elevation components (garage doors, louvers, all material callouts on elevations, etc.).
- Consideration should be given to providing a parking/loading pad located as a continuation of the entry drive off of Babcock (see attached sketch). If the maneuvering area is increased across the southern property line, it would be possible to address concerns about inadequate turning radius into the garage. Increasing the width of the drive would encroach on 120 Babcock, and could require an easement (see Diagram C).
- Proponent should provide perspective or sectional studies that determine what, if any, screening of mechanical equipment is necessary.
- Provide a fence on north elevation.
- Adjust fence on south elevation.
- Consider combining some of smallest units together to provide more family apartments. This would improve the parking ratio, but more importantly, provide more family units that would give more children access to Brookline's public school system.

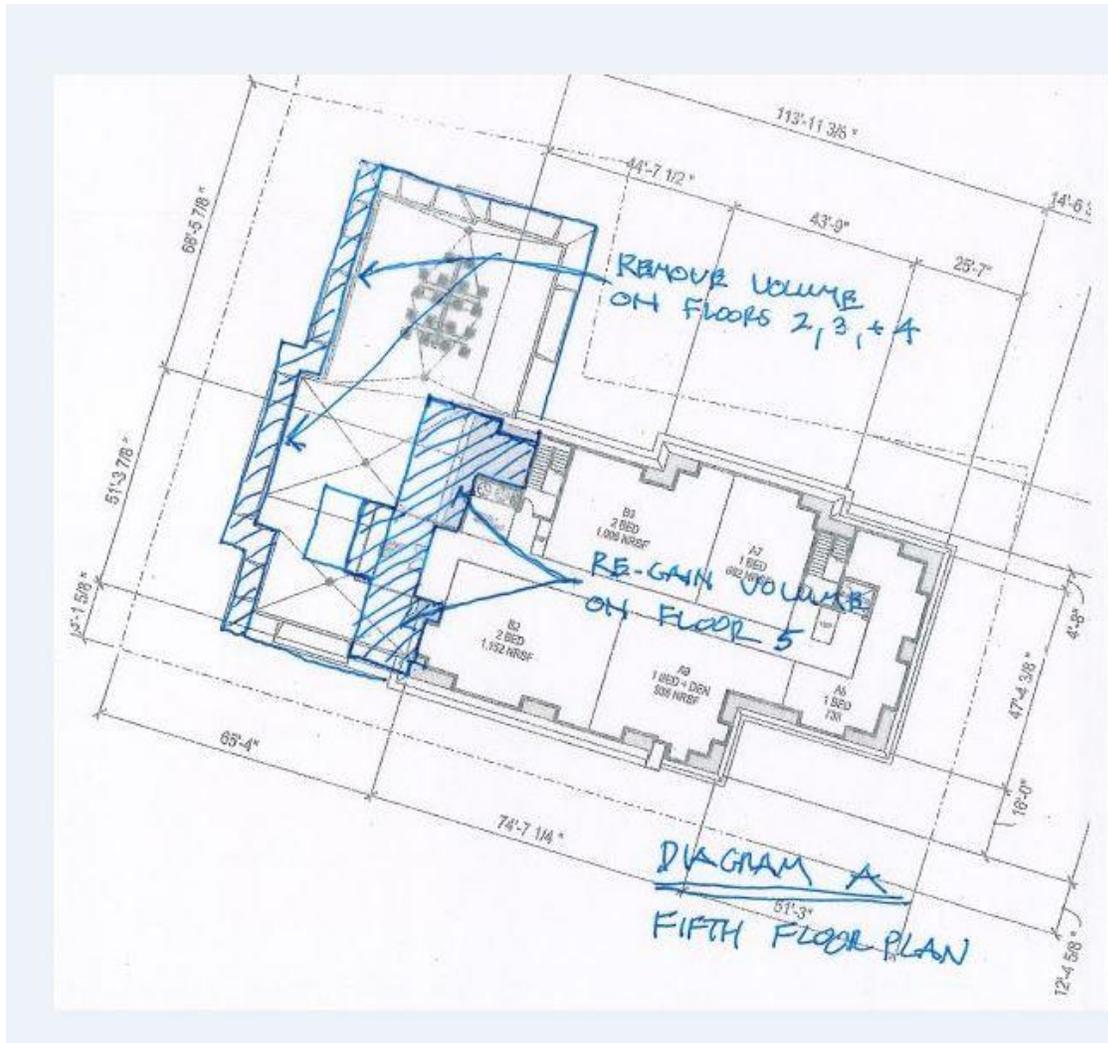
I hope you will contact me to discuss this memo in detail, or to talk about issues that I have failed to cover.

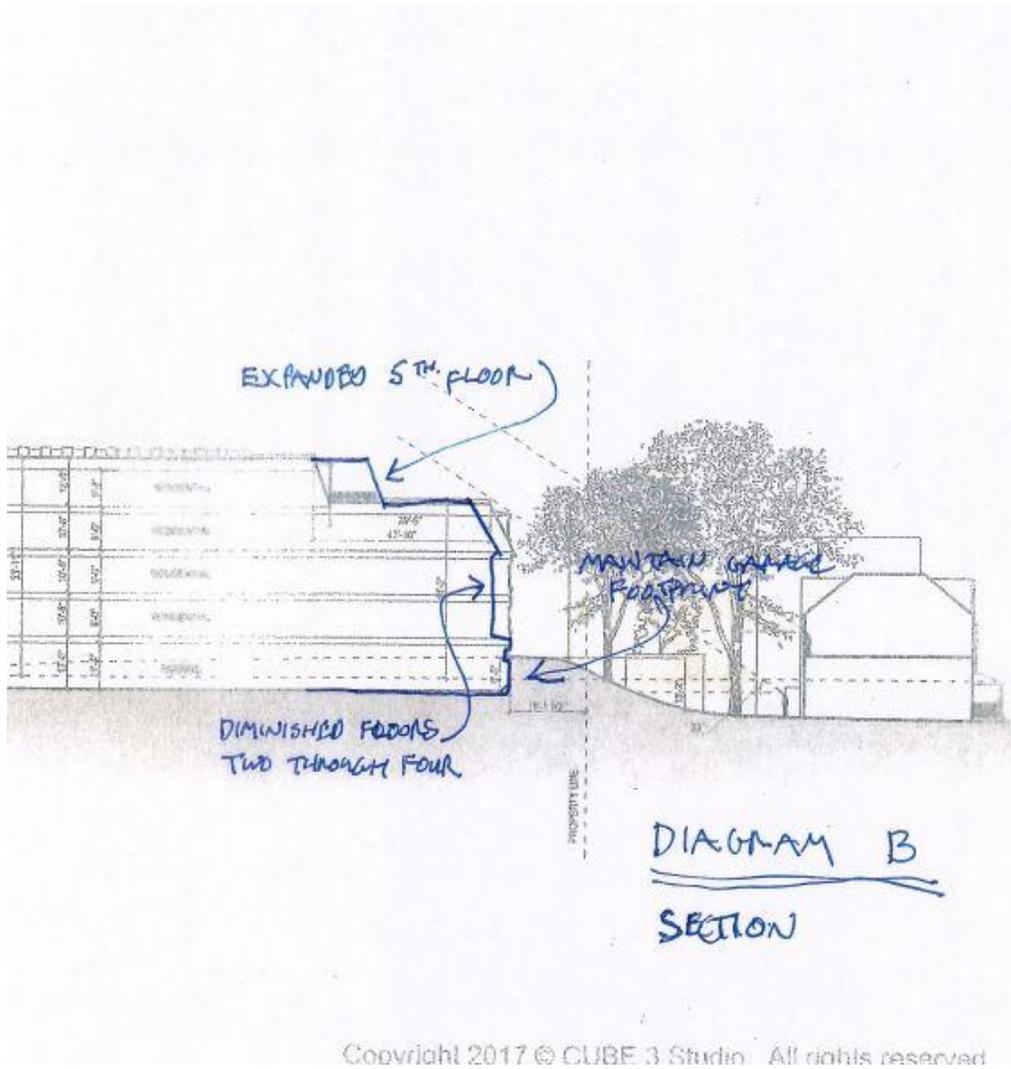
Sincerely,



Clifford Boehmer, AIA

Attachments: Diagrams A,B, and C





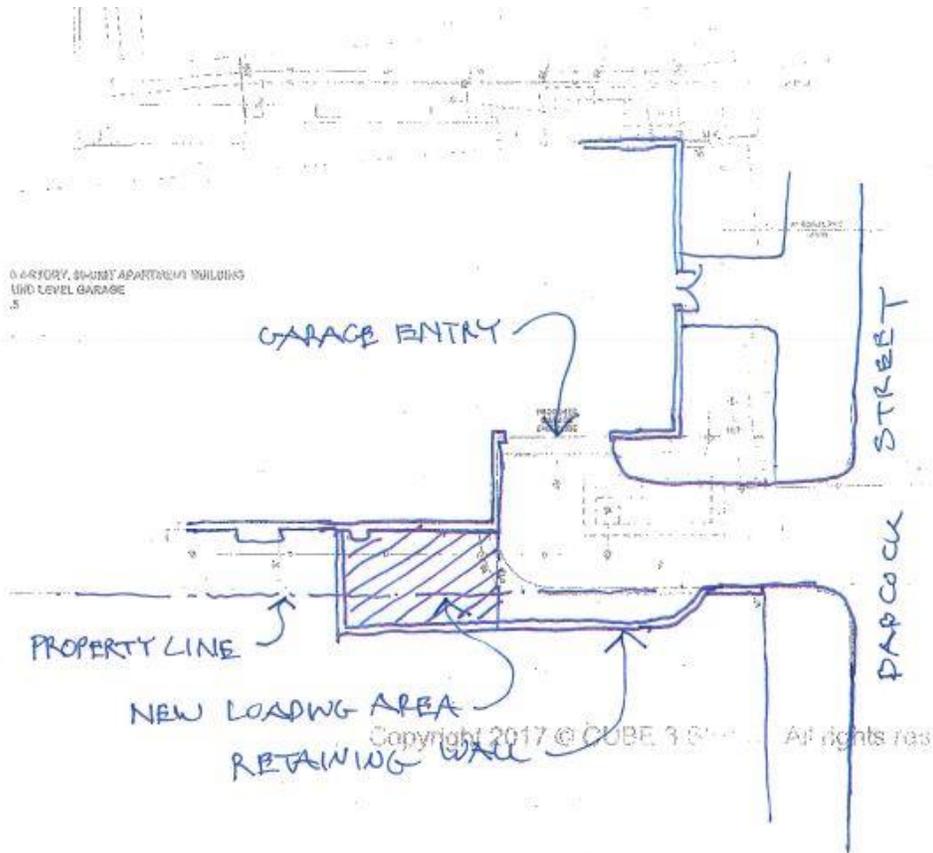


DIAGRAM C
LOADING AREA