

Myra and Howard Berloff  
30 Longwood Ave. Unit 104  
Brookline, MA 02446

April 30, 2018

Dear Members of the Zoning Board:

We are writing in regards to the proposal to build a 12-story building at 1299 Beacon St. and are asking if it is possible to get an explanation from Mass Housing as to how the minimal modifications to the previous proposal could possibly have been sufficient to allow a PEL be granted. After the previous round of hearings the developer has reduced the proposed size of this building from 14 stories to 12 and from 2 underground levels of lift assisted parking to one level that still utilizes lifts and valets. The modified proposal continues to fly in the face of Mass Housing Design Guidelines, and yet Mass Housing seems to have deemed this .4 acre parcel appropriate for a 12 story building.

We are in agreement that we need affordable and accessible housing in our community. However, hiding behind the need for affordable housing in town and Chapter 40B of Massachusetts state law, the developer continues to propose an enormously out of scale building for this site and location. Centered in the middle of historic Coolidge Corner, directly across from the historic T stop, this developer proposes a 12-story structure that spans lot line to lot line on a mere .4 acres; no set backs, no green space, nothing to mitigate its mass. This is not a project arising out of a developer embracing the need for affordable housing. This is a project designed out of greed. This is an example of a property owner attempting to turn a small parcel of land in an established setting into an abomination in the middle of a historically significant area, wiping out all open space on this property and impacting skyline views for the entire neighborhood.

More troubling than the out of scale design features of the building with the height of the building tremendously out of scope to the width of the public way, are the problems that will arise on Sewall Ave. when additional cars and ancillary moving vans, service vehicles, trash removal vehicles, delivery trucks, and emergency vehicles begin using this small street that was never designed to accommodate the needs of a high rise apartment building. Currently there are times during almost every day that cars are lined up on Sewall Ave. stuck because of the double and sometimes triple parked cars, honking their horns to get someone to move who is either picking their child up at Temple Sinai or a mail truck trying to park or a postal worker loading their personal car - and this is what it is like on a clear day. Add snow when the street has been reduced by at least a lane and mounds of snow are obstructing drivers' views coupled with children scampering to get to or be let out of their parent's car and dashing to get to one of the programs at the Temple, and this new building is setting up the perfect storm for someone to get hurt - or worse.

We understand the reason this project has gotten as far as it has is because it is being developed under the guise of MGL Chapter 40B., and that the developer has relied on the zoning protections afforded by 40B. But interesting is that he has

chosen to ignore those requirements that are not in his single minded best interest. For instance, P.30 of the Mass Housing 40B Design Handbook states: "Individual parking spaces should be designed, maintained and regulated so that no parking or maneuvering incidental to parking is on any public street or sidewalk and so that any automobile may be parked and un-parked without moving another automobile."

How does a parking plan that utilizes lifts and attendants comply with the requirements in the Mass Housing Design Guide? We realize the proposal talks about the advantages of using the easily accessible public transportation in this area and that many people will walk to the proposed retail stores. But this proposal doesn't entirely eliminate parking as has been done in some of the buildings in Boston. It continues to include parking for both residents and retail. In addition, the preliminary drawings show absolutely no indoor parking that would accommodate a full size handicapped van. What would happen if a tenant moves in who drives a modified accessible van where the driver's seat is removed to accommodate a wheelchair? It is not possible for an attendant to drive that vehicle, and it is equally impossible for that person to park their car independently.

We moved to Brookline nineteen years ago because of the diversity of its residents and because it was important to us to live in a safe walkable community. We moved to Brookline with our daughter who is disabled. She uses a power wheelchair and when she can, she is out in the community with her service dog. Adding the number and constellation of vehicles to an already congested Sewall Ave. will exponentially escalate the danger of her being a pedestrian since she is lower in sight line and could very well be in the blind spot of the large vehicles that will now need to navigate Sewall Ave.

Nothing in the surrounding neighborhood remotely resembles the building being proposed at 1299 Beacon St. This is a neighborhood of 2-3 story Victorian houses, 3 story brownstones and 4-5 story low-rise apartment buildings. We most likely would not have moved here if there were a 12-story glass high-rise building as our immediate neighbor. More than changing the esthetics of Coolidge Corner (which is a destination point for so many people) the increased traffic caused by a building of this magnitude will make our neighborhood no longer safe for pedestrians, especially if that pedestrian is using a wheelchair.

No one we have spoken to is opposed increasing the housing stock in the area, and in particular affordable housing is sorely needed. However, this design is ill-conceived at best, and arrogant and self-serving at worst. We all need safe affordable housing, and we hope the town continues to work toward that effort. But this building, as designed in this location is not an appropriate answer; and the 40B design guidelines seem to agree.

We hope you are able to work with the the developer to design a building that has less retail space, fewer apartments, and parking; one that includes more green space and is more in scope with the neighborhood.

Sincerely,

  
Myra & Howard Berloff