



# TOWN OF BROOKLINE

*Massachusetts*

## **BROOKLINE PRESERVATION COMMISSION**

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May 31, 2018

Dear Members of the Select Board,

The Brookline Preservation Commission appreciates the opportunity to comment on the potential Hampton Court (1223 Beacon Street) Project Eligibility determination for a 40B project, proposed by Chestnut Hill Realty.

To assess the impact of proposed additions to 'Hampton Court' we must recognize that its significance largely lies in being a conscious, measured response to its immediate neighbor to the east, 'Richmond Court'. Their similarities include the use of a Tudor architectural vocabulary, overall height, tripartite massing, limestone trim, and double and triple-ganged windows. By recessing its central mass, Hampton Court even gestures toward the courtyard form that is fully realized in Richmond Court.

**Scale and Height;** The proposed addition, by more than doubling 1223 Beacon Street's height, would both overwhelm the stature of the existing building, and appear even more ungainly by contrast with the modest height of Richmond Court. As recommended by guidelines of the U.S. Department of the Interior: '...a rooftop addition should not be more than one story in height to minimize its visibility and its impact on the proportion and profile of the historic building.'

The Commission believes that buildings on Beacon Street should not be higher than 8 stories, which seems an appropriate height given the width of the street.

The scale of the proposed addition, and its dissimilarity to the existing building, is amplified using 'giant scale' two-story window groupings.

Whereas the deep setback of the proposed addition would conceal its mass, if that addition were only a story or two tall, in the case of the additional five stories, the setback disrupts any perception of a relationship between the proposed building's upper and lower parts.

**Architectural Details and Drawing Issues;** There appears to be an attempt to relate the rhythm of fenestration to that of the existing building. However, the proposed windows do not align, are not similar, and their foreign aspect is amplified by the addition's deep set-back.

Due to over-simplification of the elevations of the existing building, for example the omission of its stone string courses, it is difficult to tell whether corresponding details may be planned for the proposed addition and omitted for expediency. Likewise, it is impossible to be sure that the existing crenellation has been omitted for the sake of simplicity, or whether it is proposed to be demolished.

In several instances, the drawings contradict themselves. For example, in plan drawings the north wall of the addition is shown as flat, but the elevations appear to show two deep recesses.

The elevations don't call out proposed materials, so we can't judge their intended relationship to the existing building or Richmond Court.

**Lost Opportunities;** Over time, Hampton Court has suffered some degradation to its original architecture. For example, tall windows were replaced with short windows, and the original entrance was buried within an extremely inappropriate glass shed. These losses could be restored by fitting new windows to the masonry openings, and by removing the glass shed.

**Alternative Approach;** We suggest that the entire development might be conceived as a new building, with an address on St. Paul Street, rather than as an addition to 1223 Beacon. Perhaps more, if not all, of its footprint be located on its parking lot. There is a considerable distance between the parking lot and the Sewall Avenue courtyard building that abuts 1223 to the south. And because 1223 lies to the north, it would not put the Sewall Avenue buildings in shadow. The Commission may be open to a separate building taller than eight stories, when it is removed from Beacon Street. However, we would consider that issue in the context of the immediate neighborhood.

On behalf of the Commission, I again express gratitude for the opportunity to provide comments to the Select Board regarding the potential Hampton Court 40B project.

Sincerely,



David King  
Chair, Brookline Preservation Commission

cc: Alison Steinfeld, Director of Planning and Community Development  
Daniel Bennett, Building Commissioner  
Mel Kleckner, Town Administrator