

June 12, 2018

Zoning Board of Appeals
Town of Brookline

Re: Proposed Ch. 40B development at 1299 Beacon Street

Dear Mr. Geller and Honorable Members of the Board,

Thank you for holding a most informative hearing about the above referenced project on May 9, 2018. We write to outline significant deficiencies in the developer's current plans, which adversely impact the safety and welfare of neighbors, residents in the proposed building, and the many pedestrians (including school children) who patronize businesses in the area. Before you rule on the merits and scale of the development, we urge you to obtain additional information, ask for clarifications, and recommend modifications that will improve safety.

1. Serious flaws and omissions exist in the traffic study prepared by Vanasse & Associates. This study contains flawed data, unsupported assumptions and insufficient analysis of key features of the proposed development. As these failures have a significant impact on safety, we urge an objective reassessment through the Town's and Zoning Board's peer review process. For example:

(a) Data on Sewall Avenue were collected on days and at times that do not represent typical traffic flows.

The first time (September 2016), Sewall Avenue was officially closed to pass-through traffic to accommodate nearby construction. We communicated on this topic with the Traffic Dept. and that email correspondence, including photo documentation, is attached.

The second time, data were collected on a public holiday: MLK Day in January 2018.

Although Sewall Avenue has its share of "rush hour" cut-through traffic, peak traffic times are extended owing to the post office, shoppers at Trader Joe's, and the religious school at Temple Sinai. Postal vans and delivery cars load up through at least 10 AM, when double/triple parking is common and vans or trucks routinely drive on sidewalks to bypass the logjam. Photos taken on typical mornings at different times of year illustrate this point. Traffic related to the school peaks in the afternoon, before "rush hour," and shopping at Trader Joe's peaks around and after 6 PM.





In defining “rush hour” by convention, the study has collected data that do not accurately represent peak or typical traffic flows. It is thus seriously flawed as a basis to evaluate the impact of the proposed development on the safety and welfare of the neighborhood.

(b) Unsubstantiated assumptions regarding residents’ use of public transit.

The study relies on incentivizing residents of the new 1299 Beacon with discounted MBTA passes. What is the basis for this assumption? We find it *improbable that residents paying the rents as proposed (market and subsidized) will be adequately motivated.*

“Public transit” these days is as likely to encompass Rideshare Apps as MBTA trains and buses. The expected increase in Uber and Lyft riders will *increase congestion* on both Beacon Street and Sewall Avenues, with resulting compromises in public safety as emergency vehicles are impeded, pedestrians share the sidewalk with vehicles, and children navigate between double-parked cars.

(c) Lack of consideration about delays necessitated by a parking scheme that is multi-tiered, valet-only, and wholly reliant on automobile lifts.

The study (or any part of the developer’s proposal) fails to address how the parking scheme will manage inevitable backlogs resulting from an unconventional parking scheme or an unanticipated demand. No “release valve” is planned for such backlog, which will spill onto Sewall and Longwood Avenues while residents wait for a valet or car elevator.

(d) Unrealistic assumptions regarding traffic/parking related to the retail outlets.

Currently a single store (Neena’s) has 12 dedicated parking spots; additional parking in the neighborhood is scant. Despite ~4-fold expansion of retail space, the plan leaves *fewer parking spaces for retail customers*, who are also less likely than residents to avail of valet-only multi-tiered underground parking. The inevitable non-compliance, confusion, and abuse of abutters’ driveways will adversely affect pedestrian, cyclist and driver safety.

(e) The study concludes with a recommendation for two-way traffic on a driveway that is minimally 24’ wide.

However, all drawings show one-way traffic on a driveway that is less than 24’ wide and will be partially obstructed by parked cars. No space is allotted for vehicles to safely pass or cross one another. Accordingly, loading/unloading of passengers/goods or a reversing truck will preclude or limit driveway entry. The effects on traffic along Sewall and Longwood Avenues, including emergency vehicles, will be substantial and adverse.

2. Specific anticipated needs of a 55+ clientele are not addressed.

(a) Many people work well into their 60's and 70's, and Coolidge Corner housing will likely attract professionals who drive to work. The vehicular traffic expected from such commutes is at odds with the laughably small projections of the traffic study and in the developer's overall planning.

(b) Many elderly residents will need longer than average times to enter and exit from automobiles, often into and out of wheelchairs. The parking and driveway arrangements seem not to accommodate the expected proportion of elderly residents.

(c) Other elderly residents will need transportation such as The Ride, vans for Elder Day Care, etc. These vehicles are wider than average and lengthy loading times require other vehicles to wait while the driver assists passengers. The same confined space will also be used for truck and van deliveries. The skeletal plans proposed for traffic and circulation fail to address these expected safety and welfare issues.

(d) Other 55+ residents can expect a higher than average frequency of visits from nurses, health aides, physical therapists, etc. Parking needs for health-related visitors (who cannot typically meet their hourly/part-time demands by public transit) may easily exceed those for retail stores. No arrangements are proposed for this anticipated need.

In summary, the *developer's proposal casually asserts that elderly residents have reduced traffic needs* without properly addressing ANY of the above easily anticipated needs of a 55+ community.

3. Inadequate circulation plan for the anticipated increase in truck traffic.

(a) With 74 new residences and 12,000+ sq. ft. of commercial space, truck/van deliveries will increase significantly: UPS/FedEx, retail trucks, and deliveries necessary to support the proposed catering service. The current allocation is too small to accommodate the expected traffic and uses the same access for trucks, passenger cars, and emergency vehicles. The plan does not account for the likely frequent occasion that more than one truck arrives at the same time. Spillover onto Sewall Avenue will be unavoidable and recklessly hazardous.

(b) As Sewall Avenue is a narrow one-way street, trucks must back in to or out from the limited zone currently designated for deliveries. The turning radius is inadequate for most



trucks to navigate readily and sight lines (limited by the post office dumpster, trees, and fencing) make it difficult to see pedestrians. Trucks will likely abuse or hinder egress from two opposite driveways (which together serve a dozen households) or drive and park over sidewalks. Current scenarios illustrated by the attached photographs on typical weekdays will worsen, markedly compromising pedestrian and driver safety.

4. No plans for refuse removal or the effect of snowstorms on the traffic flow.

(a) With 74 residential units, multiple stores, and a food catering service, the volume of waste will be substantial, possibly requiring daily pick-up. The plan does not address this issue. Because of the short length of the curb and the parking alongside it, curbside pick up of the anticipated volume of waste is untenable and will further endanger pedestrian and vehicular traffic. The only workable alternative seems to be a dumpster. Where would this dumpster be located, and how will it be emptied? *The current truck corridor cannot accommodate both deliveries (including food) and a dumpster*, and it abuts the rear residential entry. Nor is the height clearance adequate for a truck to unload a dumpster.

(b) The traffic and circulation plan is untenable even in the best weather and will result in



utter chaos with amplified hazard during and after heavy snow. Even 1" to 3" of snow will back the development's private traffic further into Sewall Avenue, and when snowfalls exceed that modest quantity, the movement of trucks, passenger cars, and emergency vehicles will be materially compromised. Although the building will cantilever over part of the driveway, considerable snow will accumulate throughout, including the curb, and the proposal leaves no space to collect plowed snow and no traffic or parking contingencies. The below photograph shows snow from this past winter, collected exactly where the developer now proposes all vehicular traffic for the new development.

(c) We and other abutters have pointed out the refuse and snow-related deficiencies in writing and at every public hearing, starting with the first Selectpersons hearing. Yet the developers fail to address these points or to engage constructively with abutters to mitigate vital safety concerns. The apparent contempt for the process is disappointing.

5. Total dependence on functioning automobile lifts.

(a) Multiple cars will often need to be parked or moved at the same time, often requiring one or more to be moved in or out of an upper parking tier. Neither the traffic study nor the proposal accurately addresses the length of time necessary for the one proposed valet (or even additional personnel) to identify, move, and replace vehicles. Every residential and commercial parking structure with the expected wait times provides adequate on-site waiting space for vehicles. Without such space built into the site design, the backlog will spill onto Sewall Avenue (which is currently taxed to its limits) and compromise safety.

(b) All access to/from the parking level depends on elevators that only accommodate one vehicle. Even when it functions optimally, the plan is unsustainable. And what happens when the elevator malfunctions? This scenario, which is not at all uncommon, will create conditions that endanger the safety of surrounding residents and drivers.

To be clear, we very much value the development of affordable housing in Coolidge Corner. We also respect the developer's property rights. In that spirit, and because safety concerns center on traffic and circulation on a congested street, we offer the following alternatives and will gladly work with Town officials to help devise other solutions to a workable and safe project.

- 1.** Increase underground parking to at least 4 levels, accessible by automobile ramps and by elevator from each above-street floor. This will mitigate major factors that will, under the current plan, inevitably cause serious and hazardous traffic jams on Sewall Avenue: dependence on automobile lifts and valets, the need to move cars from or into elevated parking tiers, and the parking projected needs for a development with 55+ housing and retail stores. The developer's added cost to construct a deeper parking structure could be mitigated by charging users.
- 2.** Reduce the size of the project to one that is commensurate with (a) the current scheme for parking and circulation, and (b) the irremediable constraints of Sewall Avenue as a thoroughfare. Designed thoughtfully, and with community input, a more modest project would consider the mobility of emergency vehicles and aim for volumes of vehicular and truck traffic that do not endanger the local community. These modifications need not make the project economically unviable.
- 3.** Eliminate the two commercial levels. Even if the resulting 8-story building will be at least twice the current zoning limit for height, truck traffic will be reduced and short-term parking needs for shoppers and store employees will be eliminated. Parking for residents and health-related staff could possibly be accommodated in 2 or 3 levels.
- 4.** If retail space is the developer's priority, accommodate the true needs that are warranted by supporting retail businesses, discussed elsewhere in this letter, and reduce the number of residential units so that both retail and residential needs can be met within the constraints of this location. Economic viability of the project should be measured as a whole, including the significant opportunities for the developer through the retail element of this project.
- 5.** Locate loading dock capabilities on the Beacon Street side of the property to support truck deliveries on Beacon, as is done by Trader Joes today.

We close with the following additional points:

1. In various drawings, the building is shown to extend all the way to the Sewall Ave. lot line or 10' in from there. Please request clarity on this detail, which has implications for truck clearances, viability of trees shown in the drawings, lines of sight for drivers and pedestrians, and many other factors.
2. Within state regulations, please consider the logistics of constructing a structure of the proposed scale, the impact during construction, and the length of that impact. Will cranes need to be situated on public roadways? If so, for how long? How will abutters and emergency vehicles access Sewall Avenue then? If the project scale is congruous with the lot size and shape, all construction equipment can be located on the property without jeopardizing public safety and welfare.
3. With participation from Town staff and safety officials, we believe it is feasible to design a commercially viable project on a scale that does not egregiously jeopardize public safety. Many 40B projects in Brookline lack a commercial element and this one violates every precedent for waivers on zoning limits. Any claim that retail stores and a building of the proposed scale represent the only paths to affordable housing in Coolidge Corner lacks credibility. We urge you to assess judiciously the distinction between the veneer of commercially viable affordable housing and flagrant greed.

Sincerely,

Lisa and Ramesh Shivdasani

51B Sewall Avenue

Attachment: Email correspondence with Traffic Department Sept 2016

From: [REDACTED]
To: "Neil Wishinsky"
Cc: "Alison Steinfeld"; "[REDACTED]"; "**Subject:** 1299 Beacon - Traffic Counters
Date: Thursday, September 15, 2016 8:55:00 AM
Attachments: [Capture.JPG](#)
[Traffic Counters - Victor Email.pdf](#)

Good morning,

I thought you might find the below information helpful. (see my email and that of Todd Kirrane) On seeing traffic counters on Sewall and Longwood, I reached out to Todd Kirrane assuming this was a town effort. He believes these may have been installed by the Developer of 1299 Beacon. The reason this is important is that the counters were up for 1-2 days and during these days there was (and still is) a parking ban on Sewall and significantly diverted traffic due to the demolition of 36 Longwood. Any count taken during this time will not likely be typical.

Not knowing how or when this information might be used for planning purposes, I thought this would be best to forward to you. As you know, our neighborhood has many safety concerns which stem from the traffic on Sewall, so we just want to be sure we all have the most accurate information possible to ensure the final project plan does not compromise safety further.

As I was typing this, I received the attached email from Victor Darish of 30 Longwood. Thank you for your time and effort.

All the best,

From: Todd Kirrane
[mailto:tkirrane@brooklinema.gov]
Sent: Wednesday, September 14, 2016
11:46 AM
To: [REDACTED]
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: RE: Traffic Counters on Sewall



These are most likely installed by the traffic consultant hired by the developer of the Nina's Lighting project as part of the design development process and not by the Town.

Todd

Todd Kirrane
Transportation Administrator Town
of Brookline, MA

www.brooklinema.gov/transportation

www.twitter.com/BlincTransport

www.facebook.com/BrooklineDPW

From: [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

Sent: Wednesday, September 14, 2016 11:00 AM

To: Todd Kirrane

Cc: [REDACTED]; [REDACTED]

Subject: Traffic Counters on Sewall

Good morning,

I noticed this week that, presumably the town, has erected traffic counters on Sewall and Longwood. As a resident on Sewall, we are glad that this is being measured.

I just thought I'd note that the day the counters were erected is the same week that there is a parking ban on Sewall and major disruption in the area due to the demolition of 36 Longwood. People are atypically avoiding this area. Plus it's the first week the Temple day school programs have ceased for the fall. So, with no parking on Sewall, temporary relief on Temple activities, and winter issues pending another couple months, I'm not sure you'll get accurate counts of actual, typical activity unless you leave these up for some time. Even the postal trucks have been avoiding Sewall this week as much as they can due to the parking ban.

Thanks for your time. I just thought this was important to share. We do hope you are able to obtain an accurate representation of activity.

All the best,