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September 2, 2018

Maria Morelli, Senior Planner
Town of Brookline Planning and Community Development Department
333 Washington Street
Brookline, MA 02445

RE: 1299 Beacon Street Proposed 40B Development
Preliminary Design Comments

Dear Maria:

Thanks for asking me to work with you on Brookline's review of the proposed 40B development at 1299 Beacon Street. Per your request, in anticipation of making a presentation at the September 5, 2018 Zoning Board of Appeals hearing, I'm writing to briefly comment on the documents that have been provided to me, discussions during the site visit, as well as observations from my site visit.

To date, I have reviewed the following documents:

Project Application Materials

- Project Eligibility Letter from MassHousing dated March 27, 2017
- SketchUp model from CBT dated June 4, 2018 (not certain of date)
- 1299 Beacon Street Shadow Study dated June 4, 2018 (CBT)
- Atlas Map – Ground Floor 1299 Beacon Street dated 6.04.2018
- Sections – Proposed Project 1299 Beacon Street dated 6.04.2018
- Existing Conditions Plan 1299 Beacon Street dated 06/27/18
- Maximum Building Height (sectional drawing) 1299 Beacon Street dated 07.06.18
- 1299 Beacon Residential Project drawing set dated July 24, 2018
- Memo re: Summary of Changes and Design/Programmatic Changes dated July 24, 2018

Consultant and Town Reports

- Parking Peer Review report from Walker Consultants dated June 28, 2018
- Traffic Peer Review report from Environmental Partners dated July 6, 2018
- Memo to Zoning Board of Appeals from Ashley Clark re: Trader Joe parking dated 06/29/2018
- Memo to Chief Morgan from DS Myles Murphy dated 7-2-18
- Memo to Zoning Board of Appeals from Daniel Bennett dated July 10, 2018
- Memo to Zoning Board of Appeals from Maria Morelli dated July 10, 2018
- Email to Maria Morelli from Todd Kirrane dated July 11, 2018
- Planning Department presentation to the Zoning Board of Appeals dated July 11, 2018

Correspondence from the public and consultant to public

- Letters and emails to Planning Department and the Zoning Board of Appeals from Brookline residents (and Temple Sinai) dated from April 17, 2018 through June 27, 2018 (total of 24 documents, all in opposition to various aspects of the proposed development)
- Letter to Zoning Board of Appeals from John Gillon (Gillon Associates) dated June 28, 2018

Initial meeting at the site with the developer's design team and a representatives of the Town:

This reviewer visited the site and surveyed neighboring areas on Friday, July 27. Attendees included the project's developer and architect, as well as Planning Department staff. The existing building was surveyed, and there were brief discussions of the plan set dated July 24, 2018.

Site visit and reconnaissance assessment of surrounding residential and nonresidential areas within 1/2 mile of the project site:

The nearby neighborhood was walked and photographed by this reviewer.

Some preliminary comments regarding the site plan:

- This reviewer's most significant concern regarding the site plan is on the Sewall Avenue face of the building. The streetwall along Sewall running from Longwood to Charles is challenging, largely because there is no consistent relationship of the various buildings to the street. The first two buildings on the north side of the street present the service sides of commercial uses, with significant parking fields in front that makes the transition between commercial and residential uses (which is the current condition at the third site, which is the subject property). After passing the rear of 1299, there is another commercial backside, closer to the street (the postal service loading area). The last structure before getting to Charles is the Temple Sinai, which is modestly set back from the sidewalk with a narrow landscaped area that frames three entries into the buildings (although the primary Temple façade is around the corner on Charles Street).
- The south side of 1299's site is the transitional zone between commercial uses on Beacon and the multi-family uses on the other side of Sewall. The fully residential side of Sewall from its intersection with Longwood is more consistent with respect to setback from the sidewalk, but the scale and type of buildings is highly variable. The sequence going from Longwood: a 4.5-story multifamily, a 2.5-story woodframe, gable roof structure, a driveway back to another small scale home, a 7-story multi-family, and just past the Charles intersection, an 11-story residential high rise. However, while the height of the buildings is inconsistent, there are pedestrian-scale gestures made through building massing, detailing, hardscape, and landscaping.
- As currently envisioned, the 1299 Sewall Avenue setback varies somewhere between ten and fourteen feet because of the curvature of the road (it is not clear if the overhang at the vehicular and resident area encroaches into the setback indicated on the Atlas Map). The height of the elevation along Sewall is at least 122 feet (not including any parapet, which is not indicated on the Maximum Building Height diagram). The existing building directly across the street from this elevation appears to be more generously set back, and is well landscaped along its entire length. More importantly, the structure is only 4 to 4.5-stories tall. It is this reviewer's opinion that the placement of the proposed building, in such close proximity to the street, excessively constricts the street section. This tight setback is not successfully mitigated with any meaningful enhancements to the pedestrian realm. In fact, the treatment of the Sewall elevation exacerbates the "service drive" nature of that side of the street, virtually appropriating the street as 1299's driveway.
- Note that the PEL issued by MassHousing states "the Applicant should be prepared to address specific concerns...and to discuss possible modifications to building plans and elevations aimed at improving its integration into the surrounding neighborhood." (at time of issuing letter the project was 74 units). In this reviewer's opinion, in addition to being poorly integrated, the current 1299 plan also sets a poor street-making precedent for any future development that may happen on the adjacent sites.

- Given the very tall floor to floor height on the first two levels, the streetscape would greatly benefit from setting back all residential levels 3 through 10 (note that this is the proposed massing approach on the Beacon Street elevation where the building sets back at the third, and again at the ninth floors). More shaping of the massing of the south end and stronger horizontal expression is another mitigation strategy that should be explored (potentially increasing the setback at all levels and stepping the footprint to better follow the curve of the street).
- Shadow impact on Sewall would be reduced with an increased setback from the street and step backs at upper levels.
- Rethinking the drop-off drive configuration (which might include narrowing of the one-way entry and relocation of columns) may make it possible to increase the length of the landscaped area along Sewall Avenue.
- Setback on Beacon Street side that provides a continuation of the wide sidewalk on the adjacent site to the west is appropriate.
- It appears that useable outdoor space is limited to outdoor terraces and roof decks. Given the urban setting and nearby public open spaces, combined with the target population of the building, this approach probably makes sense. However, consideration should be given to increasing the indoor amenity space for the residents and their guests (see building design comments below).
- Minimal residential-level side setbacks on the northern wing of the building will be problematic if similar scale buildings are developed on the neighboring sites.
- Is any bicycle parking provided on the site? (there appears to be no bike parking indicated within building either)
- Is there a proposed system for notifying pedestrians when cars are exiting the parking garage?
- No site lighting plan has been provided.
- This reviewer does not know the resolution of the issue of egress from neighbors building and the degree to which it impacts 1299's plan.

Some preliminary comments and questions regarding the building designs:

- As noted above in connection with the site design, the building's scale, massing, and proportions, combined with nearness to Sewall Avenue, creates an unsatisfactory transition from the commercial frontage along Beacon and the residential streetscape of the south side of Sewall. Generally, the massing on Sewall is blocky, too shear-faced and monolithic, with most of its pedestrian-level frontage dedicated to service side functions. The volume needs to be better sculpted to help integrate the building into the neighborhood. At street level, too many critical functions are packed into too little space.
- The residential entry, that should have a meaningful connection to the street, is tucked back something like fifty feet under an overhang. No apparent attempt is made to relate to the existing structures on Sewall Street with respect to materiality, scale, or function, any of which could help enhance the pedestrian environment (which will be more intensely inhabited with the introduction of this structure). By contrast, the proposed Beacon Street elevation is articulated in a way that is sensitive to the existing public realm through setback, step backs at two levels, and an overall proportioning and façade organization that is very similar to its nearby "soulmate" building at 1284 Beacon (a mixed use, multi-street-facing structure of similar scale).
- While successful as far as setback, step back, proportions, and scale, the Beacon Street front entry piece's façade treatment is "overblown" on the commercial side, and too understated at the residential entry. The 35-foot tall "Apple Store" glass façade seems out of scale for the size, and likely type of commercial spaces it will serve. While perhaps not regulated by historic district standards, the proposed façade seems more "appropriate" for Manhattan than Coolidge Corner.
- Notwithstanding serious concerns related to the blocky proportions and lack of street-making elements of the Sewall Avenue half of the building, the differentiation of the "front and back" of the overall structure through color variation, "column" spacing and rhythm, window pattern, horizontal delineations, and corner treatments is effective. The building is successfully broken up into more "digestible" pieces that can help address the two-front nature of the project site (again, similar to its "soulmate" at 1284 Beacon).

- As was noted by the building commissioner, a preliminary building code analysis is important, particularly relative to percentage of allowable openings where setbacks are minimal. Balconies appear to project further into setbacks.
- There is no area designated on the plans for visitor and shopper bike parking or storage for residents.
- As noted above, a number of critical building functions are packed into a small space on the Sewall side. A few comments: (1) It is likely that the transformer vault will need an overhead door to the outdoors (it is not likely that the vault can be buried in the drive, as there is a parking below). (2) A combination of setting back upper floors (thereby eliminating the deep overhang) and moving the residential entry forward could result in a more inviting street façade. (3) This reviewer does not concur with the opinion that it is desirable to connect a retail corridor to Sewall Avenue. The fundamental issue with that elevation is too many functions are trying to be accommodated! (4) Is a covered residential drop off necessary? It creates the need for more paved area and makes a pleasant transitions zone very difficult.
- Cutting back the southwest corner of the building over all floors will bring light into the Sewall entry zone.
- What will treatment of long, tall blank walls facing parking lots on both sides be? Artwork? Planted walls?
- What is the proposed nature of mechanical equipment screening? The top of the building will be visible from a long distance away.
- No material call outs are on included on building elevations.
- Height of residential building across Sewall as seen in bird's eye view in July 24 seems out of scale (too tall). Access to current SketchUp model with nearby context would greatly assist in review of proposed building and its impact on the public realm.
- Elevator lobby may need to be isolated on all floors.
- Trash room seems small given that it may have to accommodate commercial uses (some space within commercial areas could be designated as trash areas, along with other typical core elements).
- Are there designated parking attendant office and bathroom spaces?
- Consideration should be given to enhancing resident amenities indicated on second floor. In particular, given proposed population of building, a community space suitable for supervised child play space may be desirable.
- Square footage dedicated to fitness may be excessive given unit count.
- Not clear what catering kitchen and demo kitchen are.
- Unit plans are limited to rectangles with square footages indicated. No indication of where affordable and accessible units are proposed.
- Planning Department memo notes that the blocking of windows at 1297 should be mitigated through increased setback from the lot line. This reviewer concurs that this should be addressed.

I hope that you find these comments useful, and I look forward to participating in the ZBA hearing on September 5th.

Sincerely,



Clifford Boehmer, AIA