



# TOWN OF BROOKLINE

## Massachusetts

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING  
AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

ALISON C. STEINFELD  
Planning Director

---

TO Zoning Board of Appeals  
FROM Maria Morelli, Senior Planner  
DATE September 5, 2018  
RE Preservation Commission Comments on 1299 Beacon Street c.40B

Members of the Board,

This memo summarizes the Preservation Commission's review of the proposal at 1299 Beacon Street for an affordable housing project pursuant to c.40B. The Commission discussed character-defining features of the Beacon Street National Register District that the project team should incorporate into the design to better integrate the increased density into the surrounding context. These features are namely a consistent one-story commercial and three-to-four story residential modal pattern.

The Commission acknowledges that Beacon Street can successfully sustain tall buildings; however, taller buildings on Beacon Street that are successfully integrated make strong references to the existing modal patterns. The eight-story Pelham Hall building at 1284 Beacon Street (at Pleasant Street) is one such example. Built in the 1920s, it employs contrasting colors and materials to segment the retail spaces from the residential units to maintain a pedestrian scale at ground level. In addition, the building incorporates the masonry and red brick featured in much of the surrounding context. The scale of the building is mitigated because it is sited on a large corner lot, which provides an adequate height to street-width ratio that does not overwhelm pedestrian-scale qualities of Beacon Street.

In contrast, the narrowness of the 1299 Beacon site and the fact that this site is wedged between low slung buildings means that the project will need to adjust the proportions of the retail and housing segments to create a less abrupt transition. The lack of transition only emphasizes the incongruity of its scale. For example, the Commission recommends that the project introduce a strong, one-story cornice line for the commercial space. To improve the height-to-setback ratio, the Commission urges the applicant to step back the upper floors at about forty feet above street level. With an adequate step-back at about four stories, the height of the floors above four stories will not overwhelm the scale of the existing streetscape.

Furthermore, the double floor-to-ceiling heights of the first two floors is largely out of scale and incongruous with the existing modal pattern. In addition, incorporating more masonry and brick and using less glass, both at the retail level and on the residential floors, would serve to integrate the project more harmoniously with the surrounding context.

The Commission also assessed shadow impact on the eastbound sidewalk and on Harvard-Beacon intersection. Although the eastbound side is currently in shadow during peak pedestrian traffic times, judicious articulation of the upper floors could reduce some of the increased shadows on the major intersection.

Last, although the Commission recognizes that schematic plans are typically submitted on these applications, it wishes to note that discrepancies exist between floor plans and renderings that should be addressed to ensure feasibility.

The Commission would be glad to review any revisions to assess the project's sensitivity to the character-defining features of this important cultural district.