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September 2, 2018
January 20, 2019

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
Revised Design Comments

Dear Maria:

I'm writing to revise my review of the proposed 1299 development. I have retained most of my September 2 review within this letter to provide context for my new comments, which are all in red.

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 January 30, 2019 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 and Working Session 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
- 1299 Beacon Residential Project set of Sketch Up screenshots dated September 25, 2018.
- Drawing set/slideshow "1299 Beacon Residential Project, November 28, 2018 ZBA Hearing" produced by CBT Architects
- Building elevations dated 11/26/18 indicating percentages of openings produced by CBT
- 1299 Beacon Street Shadow Study dated November 28th, 2018 generated by CBT Architects
- 1299 Beacon Residential Project December 14, Design Progress set produced by CBT Architects
- 1299 Beacon Code Summary dated January 15, 2019 drafted by CBT Architects
- Drawing set/slideshow "1299 Beacon Residential Project, January 30, 2019 ZBA Hearing" produced by CBT
- Sketch Up model of January 30 scheme (including a number of programmed views)

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
- **Memo to Zoning Board of Appeals from Daniel Bennett dated September 5, 2018**
- **Memo to Zoning Board of Appeals from Maria Morelli dated September 5, 2018 (re: Preservation Commission review)**
- **Memo to James Fitzgerald from Arthur Stadig dated November 21, 2018 (re: parking)**
- **Letter to Rachna Balakrishna from VAI dated November 26, 2018**
- **Loading Zone Entry/Exit of Truck turning study (undated) from VAI**
- **Memo to Alison Steinfeld from James Fitzgerald dated November 27, 2018 (traffic)**
- **Email/review to Maria Morelli from Todd Kirrane dated November 27, 2018 (numerous attachments)**
- **Memo to Rachna Balakrishna from Alan Simon dated December 27, 2018 (revised January 15, 2019)**

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
- **Letter to the Zoning Board of Appeals from Sullivan & Comerford, P.C. dated September 12, 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.

Consult with the Applicant's design team, as appropriate;

Town Planning Staff and this peer reviewer met with the design team and developer on September 25 and December 14 to review project design progress. There was a conference call on November 29, 2018.

Provide an oral presentation to the ZBA:

This reviewer presented a preliminary report dated September 2, 2018 at a ZBA hearing on Wednesday, September 5, 2018.

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 changes incorporated into the current scheme have addressed concerns about the pedestrian walkway/streetwall design. Most importantly, the southwest corner of the structure originally formed a sharpened, acute angle with the Sewall Street façade. The original Sewall at-grade-entry to the building was deeply shadowed under a large entry canopy. In the current scheme, the southwest corner been truncated, and the Sewall upper elevations have been moved further from the street, opening up the building entry to sunlight and plantings, and as importantly, has opened up the perceived spatial entry to Sewall Avenue. The massing that was lost along Sewall and the Trader Joes parking lot was relocated to create an additional residential floor across the footprint of the building (i.e., the massing was re-distributed in order to minimize negative impact).**
- 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. **The current design has incorporated a pronounced step-back and strongly stated horizontal band at an elevation off of the street very similar to the existing structure across the street. With these features, plus the proposed landscaping at the 1299 building entry court, the two buildings, existing and proposed, work together to form an inviting gateway into Sewall off of Longwood (this feature could be greatly strengthened if it were possible to reshape some of the corner parking spaces in the Trader Joe lot....).**
 - 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. **See comments above regarding proximity to street. As far as the "service entry" feeling, design changes have largely mitigated that reading. This was achieved by making the central pedestrian entry to the building the most prominent façade feature. It is forward of both of the overhead doors, the ground plane landscaped, and the vehicular drop off drive eliminated, creating a direct connection from the sidewalk to the entry lobby. Take note that careful design of both the loading dock and parking entry overhead doors is critical in order to fully negate the service entry feeling.**
 - 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. **The current proposal is significantly better integrated through building massing, dimensional referencing of nearby existing buildings, setbacks, step-backs, and landscaping. This is the case for both the Beacon Street and Sewall Avenue elevations. On the Sewall side, the ground level façade has been activated with an expanded entry lobby and a club/meeting room. The Beacon Street side has been modified by placing the restaurant use at grade (5000 SF), with the retail space moved to the second level (5500 SF). This was reversed in the original scheme. This change places the most visually and physically accessible commercial space façade activated for more hours/day.**

- 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). **This suggestion has been incorporated in the 1/20/19 design.**
- Shadow impact on Sewall would be reduced with an increased setback from the street and step backs at upper levels. **According to shadow studies from June 4th, 2018 (old massing) and November 28th, 2018 (which depicts roughly the same massing as the 1/30/19 design), impact on Sewall Avenue and its sidewalks to the east of 1299 is limited to afternoon hours, all seasons. The changes in massing have significantly improved the negative impact of these shadows. Early morning shadow impact to the Trader Joes parking field (which is minimal) is also diminished with the new massing, but not dramatically.**
- 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. **This suggestion has been incorporated in the 1/20/19 design.**
- Setback on Beacon Street side that provides a continuation of the wide sidewalk on the adjacent site to the west is appropriate. **This feature remains part of the 1/20/19 design.**
- 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). **A Club/Meeting room has been added to the Sewall Avenue side of the building. Second level resident amenities remain very similar, although the Leasing Office is no longer indicated. Is one required?**
- 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. **This does not appear to have changed in the new scheme.**
- Is any bicycle parking provided on the site? (there appears to be no bike parking indicated within building either). **January 20, 2019 plans indicates a small bike rack on Sewall, and resident bike storage for 18 bikes in two rooms on the upper two parking garage levels (9 spaces per room). This is ratio of less than one bike for every 5-units, which seems very low. City of Cambridge would require 83 spaces for typical rental property, 40 if the units were considered to be “elder oriented” (which does not seem to be the case for 55 year-olds). To these “Cambridge resident counts” should be added additional spaces for employees of the restaurant and retail spaces.**
- Is there a proposed system for notifying pedestrians when cars are exiting the parking garage? **Not known.**
- No site lighting plan has been provided. **Some designations for some of the building lighting are indicated on the Landscape Plan. More information would be required for a detailed analysis.**
- 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. **Still unknown. Building Commissioner memo from September 5, 2018 states that “If the applicant were to submit the current plans for a building permit, or if the violation at 1297 Beacon remains unresolved by that time, I would deny the building permit application because the project would not comply with the State Building Code and therefore is not safe”, and goes on to say “The plans for 1299 could be revised to provide a passageway (egress 50 feet away from building) to a public way in compliance with the State Building Code.”**

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. **These issues have been remedied in the current design, pending review of overhead loading dock and parking doors.**

- 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). **Largely resolved, as noted above.**
- 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. **This aspect, along with several others, were commented on in the Maria Morelli memo from September 5, 2018 that summarizes the Preservation Commission’s review of the project. The January 20 revised Beacon Street façade design has improved the scale by subdividing the large glass area that serves to emphasize a one-story commercial reading. In addition, a more inviting residential entry is proposed. The new drawings call out a terra cotta façade system that reference existing nearby masonry structures on Beacon Street.**
- 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). **This remains the case with the new design.**
- 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. **The developer has submitted building elevations with façade material area takeoffs that seem to indicate that there are no issues with proposed percentage of openings. However, this reviewer would request some additional information or clarifications to the code analysis:**
 - There does not appear to be a code citation(s) detailing requirements related to the proposed 2-story podium construction.
 - The 9th edition was adopted in October of 2017. Memo states that the 9th is “planned to be adopted” (10th edition of the code may be adopted in 2020).
 - Current Fire Code is an amended version of the 2015 Edition of NFPA 1 (not 2012 as stated). This change occurred on January 1 of 2018.
 - Construction type is noted as Type 1B in most locations, but Table 601 highlights the column designated IIA.
- Balconies appear to project further into setbacks. **It does not appear that the new design includes balconies. To be confirmed by developer.**
- There is no area designated on the plans for visitor and shopper bike parking or storage for residents. **See notes above about inadequate bicycle parking.**
- 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). **Transformer is no longer on the Sewall elevation. Not clear to this reviewer where it went.** (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. **This has been done.** (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! **The retail space is now on the second level, apparently accessible only from Beacon Street (with a second emergency egress path through the residential common area). Ground level restaurant space appears to be the same arrangement.** (4) Is a covered residential drop off necessary? It creates the need for more paved area and makes a pleasant transitions zone very difficult. **There is no longer a covered residential drop off.**

- Cutting back the southwest corner of the building over all floors will bring light into the Sewall entry zone. **This suggestion is incorporated into the January 30, 2019 plans.**
- What will treatment of long, tall blank walls facing parking lots on both sides be? Artwork? Planted walls? **Current plans indicate a planted wall on the west (Trader Joe) elevation. No apparent design approach other than landscape plantings is indicated on the east-facing blank elevation (even though this will be very visible to walkers on Sewall). More detail should be provided.**
- What is the proposed nature of mechanical equipment screening? The top of the building will be visible from a long distance away. **Description of mechanical screening on rendering is limited to note that says "articulation." Elevations show that it is fifteen feet tall, which seems very high. Studies should be provided to assess how high screen actually needs to be given necessary rooftop equipment. Materiality and detailing is very important for any visible areas as significant as this is.**
- No material call outs are included on building elevations. **Current proposal is that most areas of the building are clad in "2-tone terra cotta" panels. Assuming high-quality material and installation, this would be a very attractive, long-lasting, solution with tie-in to existing context.**
- 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. **No longer an issue.**
- Elevator lobby may need to be isolated on all floors. **Not clear what approach to this is. Should be addressed in more detail in the code analysis.**
- 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). **Trash room locations, sizes, transit by elevator(s), etc. for all uses in the building must be described in a detailed memo to facilitate analysis by this peer review and others.**
- Are there designated parking attendant office and bathroom spaces? **Current plans do not appear to indicate any stacker parking, which may preclude the need for a parking attendant (??). Developer to confirm intent.**
- 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. **No change from previous plans.**
- Square footage dedicated to fitness may be excessive given unit count. **Fitness area on second level has been sub-divided to include a yoga/spin space that takes up 300SF of the original 1371SF.**
- Not clear what catering kitchen and demo kitchen are. **No change.**
- Unit plans are limited to rectangles with square footages indicated. **More detailed plans for two unit types have been provided.**
- No indication of where affordable and accessible units are proposed. **No change.**
- 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. **Setback appears to have been minimally increased.**

Various other comments:

- **Energy efficiency:** No information available at this point for review. Brookline has adopted the energy Stretch Code, which will ensure a relatively high level of sustainability, at least from an operating perspective.
- **Exterior lighting:** As noted above, some lighting was indicated on the landscape plan. New, more detailed lighting plan, fixture specs, etc. will be required as the documents advance.
- **Feasibility of incorporating environmental and energy performance standards in the design, construction and operation of the buildings, such as standards required for LEED certification:** No information that expresses the developer's desire to design and construct to a third-party-verifiable level is included in the application materials.
- Given population of building, this building is a good opportunity to incorporate Universal Design elements.
- Given the scale and intensely urban setting of the proposed development, as well as the constrained site area available for layout, a Construction Management Plan should be submitted for review.

- Six electric plug-in parking spaces for building residents is very light, given likely building population and current trends in automobile design.
- While plans are still very schematic, accommodation for restaurant venting chase(s) should be indicated.
- Has the Fire Department reviewed the current plans?
- The Transportation Division of DPW recommends that the developer providing funding for safety improvements at the intersection of Sewall and Longwood, as well as increasing parking spaces to compensate for those lost to create the new parking garage and loading area curb cuts.
- Transportation also recommends that the project comply with the Transportation Access Plan Guidelines, including transit screens, MBTA and Blue Bike subsidy, and at a minimum, requiring conduit and electrical capacity for future installation of additional electric car charging stations.
- Note that the Building Commissioner has made several specific requests for more information, which this reviewer believes are up-front project feasibility issues:
 - Review the deeds of the abutting properties to discern if there are any deed restrictions regarding use of party walls.
 - Because of the shallow setbacks and below-grade parking, the applicant should assess construction means and methods (purview of the State Building Code) that might affect project planning and design.
 - The applicant should also assess protection of adjacent properties (purview of the State Building Code) that might affect project planning and design.

I hope that you find these comments useful, and I look forward to participating in the ZBA hearing on January 30, 2019.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'C. Boehmer', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Clifford Boehmer, AIA