



DAVIS
SQUARE
ARCHITECTS

240A Elm Street
Somerville, MA 02144
617.628.5700, tel
davissquarearchitects.com

Brooks A. Mostue, AIA
Clifford J. Boehmer, AIA
Ross A. Speer, AIA
Iric L. Rex, AIA

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Maria Morelli, Senior Planner
BROOKLINE DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
333 Washington Street
Brookline, MA 02445

RE: 1180 Boylston Street
Architectural Peer Review Report

Dear Maria:

I'm writing this letter to provide comments on the revised development proposal for 1180 Boylston. As you know, I have written three previous reports dated August 8, 2016, December 20, 2016, and another dated January 24, 2017. I have retained, and in some cases modified, selective parts of those reports within this letter that are pertinent to the revised project. All comments most applicable to the current proposal are in *red italics*. I am anticipating presenting these comments at the ZBA hearing scheduled for Wednesday, June 19, 2019.

1. Review of the Developer's Application, Plans, and Drawings (and other related documents)
Documents reviewed (comments on documents contained in Section 5 below):

- *Geotechnical Memo prepared by GEI Consultants dated February 27, 2019.*
- *Environmental Memo prepared by GEI Consultants dated May 14, 2019.*
- *Civil Engineering Memo ("Drainage Analysis") prepared by Nitsch Engineering dated February 27, 2019.*
- *Parking Update Memo prepared by Simon Design Engineering dated April 26, 2019.*
- *Supplemental Traffic Information letter prepared by VAI dated April 26, 2019.*
- *1180 Boylston Street Proposed Waiver List dated May 14, 2019.*
- *Drawing set prepared by CBT Architects dated 02.27.19 (13 sheets).*
- *Drawing set prepared by Nitsch Engineering and Boston Survey, Inc. (7 sheets, various dates).*

(REFERENCE MATERIALS)

- Handbook: Approach to Chapter 40B Design Reviews, prepared by The Cecil Group, Inc. for DHCD, MassDevelopment, MassHousig, and MHP, January, 2011

2. Initial Meeting at the site with the Developer's Design team and Representative of the Town

The development team conducted a site walkthrough, commencing at about 11:45 on Tuesday morning, August 2, 2016. Attending included Cliff Boehmer (Architectural Peer Reviewer), Alison Steinfeld (Brookline Department of Planning & Community Development), Maria Morelli (Brookline Department of Planning & Community Development), Bob Engler (consultant to the proponent), two representative of the project architect, Raj Dhanda (the proponent), and one other representative of the proponent.

As the site is rather small, it was possible to observe all of the edge conditions, including the six-family structure to the east, the broad sidewalk along Boylston Street (with extensive overhead electrical lines), cars parked along Boylston (not obvious if legally parked), the adjacent two story commercial structure to the south on Hammond, and the two, 2.5 story, two-family homes directly to the south on Heath Street. There appear to be three mature trees at the perimeter of the site, all of which would be removed to facilitate the construction of the new building. There is an eastbound #60 bus stop just across Hammond, a westbound stop directly across Route 9. This bus travels from Kenmore Square to Chestnut Hill via Brookline Village and Cypress Street.

3. Conduct site visit and reconnaissance assessment of surrounding residential and nonresidential areas within one mile of the project site.

The site is located on the southeast corner of the very active intersection of Boylston and Hammond Streets. Signalized crosswalks traverse both streets. To the south of the site on Hammond Street, there is an adjoining commercial structure with no side setback, or setback from the sidewalk (*this site has been added to the proposed project site*). Beyond that point, on both sides of the street, there is mixed scale residential, with various setbacks. There is a nearby athletic facility, a cemetery, Pine Manor College, and the Beaver Country Day School. Further south and to the east is the Brookline Golf Club, and to the west, a little less than a mile from the site, is significant conservation land.

Immediately north on Hammond is the Longwood Club, and a little more than ¼ mile away is the Chestnut Hill MBTA train stop. The area is predominantly low density housing, with the Chestnut Hill School less than ½ mile away. And about a mile to the north is the beginning of the Boston College campus.

To the west on Route 9, on the north side, there is a sidewalk that is alongside about ¾ mile of commercial structures and parking lots, all the way past the front of The Shops at Chestnut Hill. Beyond that point continuing west, there is mostly commercial development with some small scale housing mixed in. The commercial development doesn't fully peter out until about .9 miles west of the site.

The south side of Route 9 (the project side of the thoroughfare), moving westward is a little different. For about .4 miles there is continuous commercial development directly on a sidewalk that abuts the road (as opposed to being set by the width of parking areas). There are very few street trees, but the sidewalk is continuous, broken only by side streets. There is a non-signalized crosswalk about 850 feet from the site. After about ¼ mile, this pattern gives way to commercial development set back something like 60 feet from Route 9, with parking and drive lanes intervening. Commercial development on the south side doesn't end until about .9 miles west of the site.

Eastward on Route 9, there is a continuous sidewalk, with a narrow planting strip and bike/parking(?) lane separating fast moving traffic from pedestrians. No guardrail is present. There is a spotty collection of street trees, as well as some trees on private property overhanging the sidewalk. After passing a few, small scale multi-family structures and nearby small commercial enterprises, there is a non-signalized crosswalk, followed by another one about 700 feet further on. The in and outbound lanes of roadway between the crosswalks are divided by continuous steel guardrails. The quality of the walkway is variable, but does continue past the Benevolent Association, on to the health care facility about .8 mile from the site. There is a signalized crosswalk at the Benevolent Association.

The conditions of the pedestrian walkway on the north side of Route 9, to the east of the site, are variable. As on the south side, there is no structured protection from traffic, and the walkway width varies, with some stretches somewhat overgrown with trees from adjacent private property. After passing the Longwood Club, there is no commercial development for a little less than a mile (just past the Brigham & Women's facility on the south side).

Most parties would agree that there are no architecturally notable structures within one mile of the site in either direction on Route 9, nor would that stretch of Boylston be considered pleasantly walkable by modern streetscape planning standards. Traffic is plentiful, fast moving, air quality is bad, and there is no physical protection afforded to pedestrians. Other than at major intersections and parking lots, lighting is poor. Crossing Route 9 at non-signalized crosswalks is less than optimal. By contrast, Hammond Street is a much more pleasant pedestrian environment, even though it is not lined with architecturally significant structures, nor interspersed with consumer amenities like Route 9.

4. Consult with the Applicant's design team, as appropriate.

This peer reviewer has had no contact with the design team since a working session on January 18, 2017.

- 5. Provide an oral presentation to the ZBA within approximately one month of the notice to proceed. Said presentation shall include comments and preliminary recommendations on the following:**
Comments will be delivered to the ZBA on June 19, 2019.

a. Orientation of buildings in relation to each other, and to streets, parking areas, open space, and on-site amenities, and to solar access.

The proposal is for a single, six-story, mixed use structure, including about 6424 SF of commercial with 50 units of age-restricted housing above (14 @ 1-BR, 34 @ 2-BR, 2 @ 3-BR). Previous unit mix was 16@1-BR, 29@2-BR.

The footprint of the building (counting the projection of the second floor on the grade plane) occupies 14,285 SF of the 17,690 SF site.

Proposed setbacks from lot lines are variable. The underground parking levels are very close to lot lines on the east, west, and south sides, while the main body of the building changes depending upon the floor level and elevation. Perhaps most importantly from an impact perspective, the distance to the main body of building from the lot line to the east does not appear to have changed and the adjacent site on Hammond is now an extension of the proposed building.

With this addition of the neighboring property to the south on Hammond, there is a new direct abutter (616-624 Hammond Street). It is a single story commercial structure that appears to be built right up to, or very close to the property line.

There appears to be no useable open space in the current proposal (with the exception of potentially programmable sidewalk space), and landscaping appears to be limited to 5 trees planted in a 5-foot landscape buffer to the east, 4 trees planted along Boylston, and 1 tree on Hammond. This is very similar to the previous proposal.

The only on-site amenity proposed, other than the entry lobby and associated elements, as well as bike and car parking, is a 764 SF space called out as "Amenity/Fitness".

All parking is located in two levels below grade with the exception a HC van space, and what appears to be a space where a delivery vehicle can park (limited to a car vs. truck?). If those two at-grade spaces are counted, there is a total of 70 parking spaces.

There is no loading dock indicated to serve the commercial spaces, however, a pull off area within the Hammond Street public right of way is indicated on the site plan. Rear loading for three of the four retail tenant spaces along Boylston appears as if it would share the resident lobby space (which can also be accessed on the east side of the building from the driveway). All four retail spaces have direct public sidewalk entries.

Because the building lies to the north of its neighbors on Heath Street, the primary solar impact is access to diffuse, bright-sky light as well as potential afternoon shadow impact in the winter months due to of the height of the building and its nearness to the southern property line of the site. This has worsened compared with the previous proposal due to the increased length of the building along the southern property line. As was the case before, some of the impact is lessened by the presence of out-buildings to the rear of the two Heath Street homes that increases the distance of the homes from the boundary. There was no revised shadow study included in the materials examined by this reviewer, which will be a very important exhibit to review.

The structure that suffers the most solar impact is the 6-family structure to the east, separated by about a 19-foot setback from the property line, plus approximately 5 feet additional setback to the 6-family on their side of the property line. The previously submitted shadow studies indicate year-round impact on that neighbor, significantly greater than what the existing conditions impose. It appears that the revised building massing indicates that the stepping back at the upper two levels has been diminished. While the previous setback

created a negligible improvement on the shadow impact or visual access to bright western sky for the neighbors, decreasing it is moving in the wrong direction.

b. Function, use and adequacy of open space and landscaped areas.

As noted above, the only usable area that is landscaped in the proposed development is in the public right of way (i.e., street trees).

c. Use and treatment of natural resources.

N/A

d. Building design, massing and scale in relationship to the surrounding context and topography.

The building is designed to “hold the edge” of the sidewalk, extending along the Boylston Street frontage, and then curving around the Hammond Street corner, ending by directly abutting the north elevation of the adjacent commercial building on the first floor level. The mass steps back approximately six to nine feet on the second through fifth levels along the southern bound, and then appears to step back a small additional amount at the sixth level. There was no SketchUp model that would enable a more detailed review of the revised massing.

Generally, it appears that façades have been simplified, most notably by less differentiation of the top floor and some areas of the fifth floor. The south elevation appears to be missing residential windows on the western stack of units (windows are indicated in those units on the floor plans). The current drawings do not include material callouts.

The aesthetic of the façade treatment is contemporary, with broad expanses of glass opening into the retail spaces, and the appearance of virtually floor-to-ceiling glazing in the apartments. There is strong horizontal banding at the floor levels. It appears that the significant variation in the quality of materials on different elevations that was indicated in previous designs have been addressed, but a more meaningful analysis of the appearance of the building will not be possible without access to more descriptive exhibits.

e. Side and rear elevations visible from the public street, public areas and from the vantage point of nearby residential neighborhoods.

As noted above, this reviewer’s concerns about the south elevation looking like the “back of the building”, pending review of more materials, has likely been addressed. This is particularly important, as there is now a much longer run of continuous elevation. It may be the case that more articulation of that elevation will be necessary to deal with aesthetics that are very visible from the public realm on Hammond Street, as well as increased solar impact to the immediate abutters.

f. Pedestrian and vehicular circulation

Current plans show customer entry to commercial spaces off of Boylston and Hammond, with the residential lobby remaining where it was before on the Hammond Street side.

While not within this reviewer’s expertise, it is likely that the new parking scheme has alleviated concerns about queuing along Boylston Street, blocking of the sidewalk, etc. As was the case in the last version of the project, loading is proposed to take place primarily from Hammond Street. From previous review letter: “The issue of the Hammond Street loading area is reportedly “supported by the Town”, and appears in the current plans”.

g. Integration of buildings and site, including but not limited to preservation of existing tree cover

Given the expanded footprint that allow very little vegetative screening, combined with minimal step backs on the east and south, concern for impact on the neighbors to the east, as well as Heath Street remain.

h. Exterior materials

As noted above, the revised drawings do not include material call outs.

i. Energy efficiency

It is not possible to ascertain at any level of detail from submitted materials. Architectural, structural, and MEP outline specifications that were previously submitted indicate that heating and hot water system appear to be gas-fired, combined individual systems for each unit. These are generally very high efficiency, and when combined with efficient condensing units for cooling can exceed requirements of the building code. There is some concern related to a note that indicates that heaters will be direct vented to the exterior wall. While sometimes more cost effective, this venting solution can be unsightly and difficult to integrate into the cladding system. Elsewhere in the specification it is noted that dryer exhausts would also discharge at exterior walls.

j. Exterior lighting

Not possible to tell from submitted materials.

k. Proposed landscape elements, planting materials, and planting design

As noted elsewhere, there is very little available space for plantings.

l. Feasibility of incorporating environmental and energy performance standards in the design, construction and operation of the buildings, such as standards required for LEED certification

Previously submitted MEP outline specifications reference the 9th edition of the Massachusetts Building Code. Given the excellent southern exposure at roof level, consideration should be given to, at a minimum, to making the building "solar ready", which would include conduit(s) from the rooftop to the electrical room, providing space in the electrical room for additional equipment, considerate placement of rooftop equipment to minimize shadow impact, and adequate structuring of the roof for additional load imposed by panels.

Outline spec commits to blower door testing of units to ensure compartmentalization.

m. Any other design-related considerations identified by the consultant in the course of its review

- Submitted drawings do not include any detailed unit floor plans. All units are blocked out with gross square footage and number of bedrooms noted. There appear to be some errors in some of the notations: unit 202 is listed as a 2-bedroom, while it only has one bedroom; unit 209 is likely a 2-bedroom unit, but it is labelled as a 1-BR; unit 509 is a 2-BR unit, but is labelled as a 1-BR; unit mix on Level 5 is incorrect (should read 9 @ 2-BR); unit mix on Level 6 is incorrect (should read 2 @ 1-BR and 4 @ 2-BR).*
- Generally, without more detailed plans, it is not possible to review conformance with some code requirements (for example, accessibility) in any level of detail.*
- Locations/types/plans of proposed Group 2 accessible units are not provided. Note that all units in elevator-fed buildings must at a minimum, be Group 1 units.*
- Space allocated for bicycle parking seems inadequate. Plans indicate 10 spaces in the parking levels.*
- Not clear to this reviewer whether the Fire Department has any issue with the current plans.*
- Is there a revised detailed narrative describing how trash will be handled on the site?*
- Has the developer drafted a Construction Management Plan that describes impact to the community, and more importantly, to the immediate abutters during the construction period?*
- Will the proposed HVAC system be designed to deal with the poor air quality that surrounds the site due to heavy traffic on Route 9, as well as stopped traffic on Hammond Street?*
- Similarly, noise and vibration caused by heavy traffic should be dealt with in the structural and façade design. Previous submission noted that an additional layer of GWB has been proposed for the units facing streets to help with acoustical separation. However, outline specification for windows does not include triple glazing.*
- The environmental memo notes that dewatering will have to occur during construction, with the need to deal with any contaminants.*
- The importance of documentation of existing conditions at the neighboring structures, most importantly the immediate commercial abutter on Hammond was noted in the geo-technical memo.*
- The environmental memo states that with a parking level in place, no vapor removal system would be required.*

- *What role does MassDOT have in review of the project? In addition to a new curb cut, and potentially eliminating some street parking, there appears to be a need to relocate a traffic signal box.*
- n. Techniques to mitigate visual (and other) impacts**
- *As was stated in this reviewer's last letter report, to decrease the shadow impact on the 6-family structure to the east, consider stepping back the top two floors of the building at the east end. This could result in the loss of units, but will significantly mitigate that issue. It will also help to visually integrate the building into the existing context. This suggestion has not been incorporated into the current plans, and remains a serious concern. The suggested cutting back at the top two floors would also diminish the impact on homes on Heath Street.*
 - *Increase the stepping back dimension at the "attic" level of the building, around all elevations, would help to decrease the impact and apparent height of the building.*
 - *Consider increasing the plant-able, buffer area on the east side of the building between the parking drive and the property line.*
- o. Other items of note from review of submitted materials (most of these were all included in the previous review letter).**
- *Where will banks of gas meters and electric meters be located?*
 - *Current roof plan does not include rooftop equipment. Outline spec and Code Summary conflict as far as construction types of building. Should be coordinated.*
 - *The developer should confirm that the location of the transformer is acceptable to the utility (it appears to be within 5 feet of the property line).*
 - *Given that the parking levels will be within the water table and very deep, is the perimeter wall thickness adequate given anticipated earth support system and closeness to property line?*
 - *A safe walkway from the accessible spaces to the elevator lobby at level P2 should be indicated (a vehicle coming down the ramp cannot see if someone is in the travel lane on their way to the elevator).*

I hope you will contact me to discuss this memo in detail, or to talk about issues that I have failed to cover. Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Clifford Boehmer', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Clifford Boehmer, AIA