

July 8, 2019

Jesse Geller, Chair and Members  
Brookline Zoning Board of Appeals

Via email

Re: 1299 Beacon Street Development

Dear Board Chair and Members:

I am a resident of 70 Sewall Avenue, writing to express my continued concerns over the proposed 40B development at 1299 Beacon Street, aka the Neena's property. I am an architect with forty years of experience. Our building is one block from the development site, and I have a number of significant issues with the development as most recently illustrated by the developer and their design team. I feel that it is still much too large and fundamentally ill-conceived for this site.

I also want to thank the ZBA for your consistent, thoughtful criticism of the design over the past three (!) years. I feel that the developer has been arrogant and has only grudgingly made minor adjustments. Yet, in spite of their tepid gestures, the project as proposed poses significant long-term safety hazards to local residents—and during construction, will exacerbate already-latent conditions that are suboptimal from a safety standpoint.

**Bulk and Massing:** The design is simply too bulky for the small, constrained property, and includes too many parking spaces. We suggest that the developer invert their design strategy, and instead of starting with the height and mass and unit count they desire, they start by shrinking the garage footprint to permit sufficient room ON THEIR PROPERTY for construction vehicles, such as cranes, dump trucks, trailers and lay-down space, rather than having them take over any of Sewall Avenue. Then, and only then, can they determine how much above-ground space the number of parking spaces will support.

**Parking, Traffic Capacity and Vehicular Circulation:** Sewall Avenue will clearly be the primary street serving the building's residents and their cars. That section of Sewall, between Longwood and Charles Street, is already heavily congested for much of the day. The Post Office is one primary source of this congestion, as their trucks (and their workers) are parked right at the bend in the street, often straddling the curb onto the sidewalk, making walking hazardous. Second, Temple Sinai generates both foot and vehicular traffic due to its school and weekly services. Third, the removal of Trader Joe's overflow parking (in the Neena's lot) will intensify the traffic and parking problems that already exist at the market—forcing Trader Joe's customers to look for parking elsewhere in the neighborhood. And the proposed removal of between 3 and 5 on-street parking spots on Sewall adjacent to the site simply exacerbates the problem.

The current Construction Management Plan calls for reducing Sewall during construction to a single 12-foot wide driving lane. This is fundamentally flawed for several reasons:

- All it will take is a single slow-moving construction vehicle to block that lane, causing a serious back-up into the Longwood intersection, creating further hazards for pedestrians and cyclists trying to move through or across the street. Now consider approximately 1000 truckloads of soil removal and disposal, plus steel deliveries, concrete deliveries and the like.
- Having no alternative path for emergency vehicles, this will create a very hazardous situation for residents of 30 Longwood and Sewall Avenue further north toward St. Paul Street. Does the Town really want to risk the safety of abutters by forcing fire trucks and ambulances to go all the way around the block to gain access to the Temple or abutters on that part of Sewall?
- This single lane will complicate every aspect of normal day-to-day activity on Sewall Avenue for the duration of the construction. Trash trucks, mail/Fedex, Lyft/Uber and just simply residential traffic heading for Charles Street and Sewall Avenue northeast of the site will all be affected.
- Snow removal will also become even more challenging than it is already.
- One of our neighbors spoke with the Brookline Postmaster and reported the following: “When I asked him why no one from the PO has attended any ZBA Town hearings, he said they are not allowed to protest any developments even if it would negatively impact them. When I mentioned that Sewall Avenue may be blocked or even closed for two or more months in order to excavate and remove 1,000 truckloads of dirt, he said there is nothing the PO can do. He said **if Sewall Ave ends up closed, they would then ask the Town to allow their trucks to come in via Charles Street and then up Sewall Ave the wrong way.** {my emphasis added}.” I ask you, can you imagine what that situation would do to traffic and safety?

I urge you to reject the currently-proposed CMP and insist that construction vehicles be confined to the property, with no diminution of the width of Sewall Avenue. Further, as I had suggested in a previous letter, I think that the Town should install bollards along the curb of the east sidewalk to protect pedestrians and adjacent properties.

I want to summarize by being as direct as I can. The developer and the architects of this proposed development should be embarrassed by the size, height, and bulk. To propose something so clearly over-scaled—by a factor of 2 to 3—on this site is hubristic and indicates a level of arrogance and greed that I find appalling.

Please continue to urge reductions in this project; our safety depends on your efforts.

Regards,

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