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September 13, 2021

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

RE: 108 Centre Street 40B Development
Preliminary Architectural Peer Review Report

Dear Maria:

I'm writing to provide you with a preliminary review of the proposed 40B development at 108 Centre Street. I expect to discuss the project with the ZBA at their hearing on September 20, 2021. As is typical at this stage of a project, the drawings are very schematic, which puts limitations on the depth of analysis that I'm able to perform. Typically, this means that my primary focus is on site planning issues and overall building massing strategies, as going into great detail on a building design that may significantly change does not make sense.

As has been the case in all of my review letters, this review follows the format of my fee proposal sent to you on July 21, 2021.

1. Review of the Developer's Application, Plans, and Drawings (and other related documents), reports from other peer reviewers and Town officials, letters from neighboring residents, etc.

Documents reviewed (comments on documents contained in Section 5 below):

- Letter to DHCD from HSL with PEL application dated April 14, 2021.
- Project Eligibility Letter for 108 Centre from the Massachusetts Department of Housing & Community Development dated June 3, 2021.
- Letter to Brookline ZBA with Comprehensive Permit Application dated June 3, 2021.
- Various documents included in Comp Permit Application including Existing Conditions Narrative and Photos, Development Concept Narrative, Project Data Summary, Development Team, Waiver List.
- Parking and Traffic Assessment prepared by Stantec dated June 3, 2021.
- Stormwater Report prepared by Stantec dated June 3, 2021.

Town and Peer Review Reports:

- Memo to ZBA regarding Town's Progress in Creating and Supporting Affordable Housing from alison Steinfeld dated March 29, 2021.
- Letter to DHCD from Select Board dated May 21, 2021.
- Interoffice Memo from Dan O'Donnell, Engineering & Transportation Division re: Site Plan Review dated 8/13/21.

(REFERENCE MATERIALS)

- Chapter 40B Handbook for Zoning Boards of Appeal published by MHP in cooperation with DHCD, MassHousing, and MassDevelopment dated March 2017.
- Handbook: Approach to Chapter 40B Design Reviews, prepared by The Cecil Group, Inc. for DHCD, MassDevelopment, MassHousing, and MHP, January, 2011

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

This reviewer visited the site with the development team on July 29, 2021. Also attending was Maria Morelli.

3. Conduct site visit and reconnaissance assessment of surrounding residential and nonresidential areas within 1 mile of the project site.

The site is very near Coolidge Corner, a part of Brookline well served by a high density and variety of retail businesses, religious facilities, restaurants and entertainment, as well as excellent access to public transportation. There is a local concentration of housing and amenities specific to senior citizens, including the Brookline Senior Center on Winchester Street, immediately to the southwest of the project site.

Corey Hill, a primarily one and two-family residential neighborhood, is immediately to the west and southwest of the site. Dense, mixed scale residential areas on both sides of nearby Harvard Street (one street north of Centre Street) extend to the northwest for about 2/3 of a mile before intersecting Commonwealth Avenue, and somewhat larger scale (but still mixed) residential development is to the south off of Harvard Street. Various landscaped streetscapes and public open spaces are included within walking distance that greatly enhance the pedestrian experience.

While Centre Street does not fall within any Brookline Historic Districts, there are a number of well kept, largely intact large, wood-frame Victorian homes on Centre Street (7 on the north side, 3 on the south side, including the existing structure on 108 Centre). Most of the larger scale, newer buildings are located on the south side of the street (the same side as the proposed project at 108 Centre), most notably a 7-story structure, a 4-story, an 11 to 12-story residential structure at 100 Centre where it intersects Williams Street, and a 12-story structure near the intersection with Fuller Street (the recently re-clad 112 Centre Street). The tallest buildings on Centre Street are owned and operated by the same developer as 108. 2-Life, a developer/operator of senior housing has recently completed a new facility at the intersection of Williams and Harvard Streets (very walkable distance to 108).

4. Queries for Applicant's design team via staff only, as appropriate.

At the walkthrough, several aspects of the site and the proposed building were discussed, including:

- Pedestrian connection of the proposed new 54-unit facility with The Brookline Senior Center.
- Sharing of the emergency generator at 112 with the new structure at 108.
- Residents at 112 do not wish to share access of their exterior patio with future residents of 108 (security concerns were cited).
- Proposed setback from Centre Street matches 112; zero rear setback, some areas of western facade.
- Potential loss of trees along rear of proposed building due to construction process.
- Potential discrepancy between architectural rendering (Sheet A-203) and civil engineering drawings in depiction of proposed drop off drive on Centre Street.
- Potential screening of ground-mounted mechanical equipment at 112 Centre.
- Strong expression of "historic references" on proposed facades (vs. more direct reference to newly clad 112 Centre, as well as 100 Centre to the east).

5. Provide an oral presentation to the ZBA. Said presentation shall include comments and preliminary recommendations on the following:

Points from this report will be discussed at a ZBA hearing on September 20, 2021.

a. Orientation of building in relation to parking areas, open space, and on-site amenities.

The proposal is to demolish the existing 3-story wood-frame home at 108 and build a new high-rise (78 feet) 54-unit, all one-bedroom structure. All units are located on floors two through six. The entire ground level is dedicated to residential entrance and support space, mechanical areas, and common-use space that is reportedly sized for use by the broader Brookline senior community (approximately 5000 SF). There are two versions of ground floor plans included in the plan set, one of which depicts the elimination of the parking

spaces for 100 Centre that encroach on the 108 site along the east boundary (note on that option states that it “provides more adjacent open space and a slightly larger community space.” There is a partial basement proposed primarily for trash collection, as well as a providing the entry to a subterranean connection to the parking structure for 112 Centre.

While the site is very close to the Senior Center to the south, the site for 108 is separated from the Center by narrow legs of the 100 and 112 Centre Street sites (both of which are owned by Center Communities of Brookline). There is a zero-setback proposed along that boundary, as well as where the stairwells for 108 meet the ground along the western boundary of the site adjacent to 112 Centre.

There is an existing walkway in the 100 and 112 lots along the back of 108’s lot that connects to the rear of the Senior Center building. The eastern end of that walkway lands in the southwest corner of the parking lot for 100 Centre (this reviewer does not know if it meets accessibility requirements for grade, width, etc.). The rear patio at 112 also connects to the walkway, but access appears to be limited to an exterior stairway (as there is an approximate 4 feet grade change).

Proposed access to the Senior Center from 108 is by a ramp structure at the rear of the building that negotiates the four-foot grade change from the entry floor level to the elevation of the Senior Center site. One leg of the ramp is on 108’s site, the other long leg of the switchback structure is on 112’s site, just to the east of the existing exterior stair connection noted above. There does not appear to be a proposed direct connection from 108 to the existing patio at 112 (although one could go to the top of the ramp, and then return northwards on the stairway down to 112’s patio).

Given the zero-to-very-small side and rear setbacks, along with the proposed entry/drop-off drive on Centre Street, there is no usable outdoor space proposed for the new building. There also does not appear to be any outdoor patio, rooftop deck, or balcony space proposed as part of the project. While there is significant indoor activity space proposed, as well as connection to the program spaces in the Senior Center, 112, and 100 Centre, this deficiency is a lost opportunity for an amenity that would likely be well utilized.

Options for the provision of outdoor space could include the following:

- Eliminate the one-story addition on the southeast corner and rear of the building.
- Diminution of the building footprint, most significantly in north/south direction (potentially in conjunction with addition of an additional story to compensate for unit loss).
- Move structure closer to driveway for 100 Centre, redesign outdoor space between 108 and 112.
- Re-design drop-off drive as pull-off zone(s) in conjunction with moving building closer to Centre Street.
- Create roof deck area(s).
- Incorporate “panhandle” areas of 112 and 100 sites into shared open space for all three buildings

There are no proposed parking spaces for the residents of 108, caregivers, building residents, or users of the ground-level common spaces who may come from other buildings. As noted above, the basement level of 108 is connected to the 112 Centre parking garage through a “tunnel.” This could potentially provide future access to parking, shared car service, bike parking, etc. should that space become available.

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

As noted above, there does not appear to be any usable outdoor space included in the plans. The Planting Plan indicates some proposed screening in the minimal side setback areas, as well as a small area at the rear of the building (possibly in a planting well?). Opportunities for creating open spaces are outlined in the previous section of this report.

c. Use and treatment of natural resources.

This site is currently developed, as are the sites that surround it. There are trees located within the extensions of 100 and 112 sites on the south side of this building, some of which are close to 108's bound. It is not clear how these trees could survive the construction process, given the zero setback along most of that part of the building footprint (particularly as the proposed finish floor grade is four feet lower than the exterior grade). There do not appear to be any existing plantings on the project site itself.

As there have not yet been geo-technical borings done at the site, it is not known by this reviewer if there are any potential issues of building below the water table, where bearing strata lie, etc.

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

The proposed building is a high-rise structure, with existing Center Communities high-rise structures flanking on either side. Center Communities also owns the three-story residential building further to the west of 112 up to the corner with Fuller Street. All along the block between Fuller and Williams Street on the opposite side of Center Street there are residential structures, primarily wood-frame, between 2.5 and 4.0 stories in height.

The Center Street high rise to the east (100 Centre Street) is clad in concrete panels, with minimal articulation in the building's massing. Given the combination of smooth and exposed aggregate panels that make up the façade, this structure could be considered "brutalist" in its aesthetic.

To the west is the Cohen Building at 112 Centre Street that was originally clad in uniform, unarticulated brick, but was very recently re-clad in a variety of materials including masonry, metal panels, and cementitious panels. Some relatively modest articulation in the massing was part of the recladding, and several colors help to break up the scale of the building. The lower levels on the Centre Street façade are designed to accentuate the residential entry are of the building and related to a pedestrian scale. There is some outdoor, passive recreation area between the façade of the building and Centre Street. This building's aesthetic is more "contemporary" in nature.

The proposed new structure's massing is essentially box-like, articulated with modestly scaled bays of different heights applied to three of the four facades. The south façade facing the Senior Center is flat throughout the top five stories, while the lowest level has a one-story addition for most of the south elevation, wrapping around to a portion of the east façade. Depending on which Ground Level plan is developed, there is additional variation in the footprint along the east elevation restricted to the lowest level.

Strong horizontal applied cornice lines accentuate the top of the fifth floor on the east, south, half of the length of the north, and most of the west elevation. The northwest corner of the building has a cornice line that jumps up a level to the top of the fifth story. The ground level "base" of the building is also capped with horizontal banding, with a flat arch accentuating the residential entry on the street side. The stairwells near the front and rear of the building cleanly break the west elevation into three distinct areas facing the Cohen Building.

The Development Concept Narrative states that the aesthetic of the proposed structure "will be respectful of its context and site history...with detailing reflective of elements in and about the neighborhood of the Victorian era: deep eaves, bracketed bays, banding, open railings, widow boxes, corniced roof edges and tower elements."

It is clear that a building in this location of this scale is appropriate with respect to its immediate neighbors to the east and west (100 and 112 Centre). And the fact that it is centered between those two buildings with similar residential programs, but enhanced with expanded program spaces (presumably open at a minimum to other Center Community residents) makes the building's location and presence on the street very

important. However, with respect to its “fit” in the existing context, all neighboring sides of the building need to be reviewed relative to the buildings potential for negative impact.

Starting with setbacks, as noted above, setbacks are minimal, and have left no space for usable outdoor space or where robust planting areas could be developed, even if primarily designed for screening and scale mitigation. This is of particular importance on the south side of the building where there is only about 25 feet to the Senior Center, with somewhat more to the 3-story apartment complex on Winchester Street. On the street side, the introduction of the drop off drive has restricted the space between most of the building face and curb line to 5.5 FT.

Relative to massing, while a case can be made that mitigation is not a significant issue for the structures at 100 and 112 (as they are under common ownership with 108), the units at 81 to 87 Winchester would benefit from stepbacks on the upper levels. While not affecting direct shadows, this articulation would afford them better open-sky views. In general, particularly if in conjunction with a revision to the aesthetic of the building, a few bigger moves in the building massing would likely be more effective than many superficial applied decorative pieces.

Direct shadow impact and view of open sky is most significant for the residents at 112, followed by the neighbors across Centre Street. In order to accurately assess this impact, the developer should improve their SketchUp model to include the context on the north side of Center, as well as expand the shadow studies across all seasons, and include information regarding height of shadows on the homes across the street.

Finally, regarding the approach to façade design, it is this reviewer’s opinion that the applied “historic” elements, particularly because of their scale and materiality, do not help to tie the building into the streetscape. A more direct reference to the two neighboring high-rise buildings, including a look ahead to improvements that may be made to 100 Centre Street facades, would be a more fruitful path to explore. This would likely start with detailed street elevations that include 100 and 112, supported with street level perspectives that include the buildings on both sides of the street. Note that the building elevations included in the application package, while rendered in color, do not include material callouts.

Relative to topography, note that all of the building elevations in the package are drawn as if the site is flat, all the way around. In fact, the grades around the building are relatively complex, as are the connections between this site and the neighboring sites. All of the architectural drawings should be coordinated with the civil drawings, as well as important elements associated with the surrounding buildings and sites.

e. Impact of streetscapes (major thoroughfare and abutting residential neighborhood).

As stated above, including context on both sides of Centre Street is critical in order to assess the impact on the streetscape the proposed building would have. In addition, this reviewer believes that a more “global” approach to how the sites at 100, 108, 112, and the Senior Center are developed needs to be studied in a more coordinated fashion. Preferably, this “study” would explore the integration of usable, fully accessible outdoor space that could potentially be enjoyed by residents of all three buildings.

Similarly, it seems that it would be possible to coordinate the immediate streetscape/sidewalk along 100, 108, and 112 in order to minimize curb cuts, improve landscaping, and provide sufficient resident drop-off/waiting and delivery areas.

Given the central location of 108, particularly if the ground level common areas are truly meant as an adjunct to the Senior Center, methods for accentuating the entry zone in front should be considered.

f. Sensitivity to character defining features on Centre Street residential/multifamily neighborhood.

As discussed above, the introduction of another high rise building on the south side of Centre Street is not a surprising proposal. And it is this reviewer’s opinion that it can be appropriate if suitable mitigation strategies are explored and implemented, and if the overall streetscape can be improved as a result.

This project is in a section of Centre Street with a very different character from one side of the street to the other, as in fact much of Centre Street is. As previously discussed, it most likely makes the most sense to work within that framework (versus attempting to create a new, high-rise Victorian typology).

g. Viewsheds of the project visible from the public street, public areas and from the vantage of nearby residential neighborhoods.

The Applicant has provided a SketchUp model which is useful, but should be expanded to show additional context (particularly along the north side of Centre Street). See sections above regarding views and impact of the proposed project.

h. Pedestrian and vehicular access and circulation, adequacy of accessible provisions. Of particular interest are the implications of access and egress in terms of pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists. Adequacy of visitor loading, drop-off/pick-up facilities, how lack of parking might serve or not serve the program.

As noted previously, while some type of drop-off/delivery/move in area at the front of the building is conceptually sound, it is not clear that the proposed drive is the best solution given how tightly the site is packed. Access to the parking garage at 112 could potentially be utilized in some fashion to help serve the needs at 108 (beyond trash management).

While it seems from the submitted documents that the garage at 112 will be part of 108's trash management plan, more detail on the proposal should be provided. Currently, there is dumpster storage at the top of the garage entry ramp that appears to restrict exiting vehicle's view down the sidewalk towards the east.

There does not appear to be any bicycle storage indicated in the building.

Also, accessible connectivity between 100, 108, 112, and the Senior Center should be described in an overall "campus" circulation diagram.

i. Integration of building and site, including but not limited to preservation of existing tree cover, if any.

As has been stated elsewhere, there do not appear to be any existing trees on the site, which will be totally cleared of all existing improvements in order to build the project. It is not clear that some tree growth on adjoining sites can be preserved during construction. This should be clarified by the Applicant.

Because of the minimal programmable setbacks all around the building, there is very little in the way of site improvements that can be made to help integrate the project into the neighborhood through landscaping, shared outdoor amenities, etc.

j. Exterior materials.

Information regarding façade materials is not noted on the building elevations. This should be addressed as the design evolves.

k. Exterior lighting

Submitted materials do not include a lighting plan.

l. Proposed landscape elements, planting materials, and planting design; opportunities for open space.

Landscape plans are included in the submitted materials, although there is very little on-site area to work with. As noted above, this reviewer believes that landscape plans and campus circulation should be developed across all three Center Community sites and the Town's Senior Center.

m. Feasibility of incorporating sustainable building features and energy performance standards in the design, construction and operation of the buildings, such as standards required for LEED certification

The Applicant has stated that they intend to comply with Brookline's zero emission initiative, with the possible exception of domestic hot water production (note that a gas line is indicated on the utility plan).

In addition, the project may pursue Passive House certification.

n. Any other design-related considerations identified by the consultant, ZBA, town staff or working group, other peer reviewer(s), or the citizenry of Brookline.

- Because the proposed building has an elevator, all units are required to conform with MAAB Group 1 requirements.
- 5% of the apartments must be MAAB Group 2 units. The developer has indicated that some of the units may be designed to meet CBH requirements.
- All common spaces must be fully accessible.
- What is the proposed location for the project transformer?
- Can the Applicant verify that the back-up generator at 112 is sized to serve 108 as well?
- There is a zero setback on the southern elevation. What provisions are being made to provide units with windows along that elevation?
- There is a zero setback on part of the west elevation (where the stairwells meet the ground). Does the egress path from the rear stairwell have to encroach on 112's site?
- What are the window sill heights in the proposed café space (given that the floor level appears to be four feet below the adjacent grade on the south side)?
- Are trash chutes as drawn on upper floors sufficiently fire-separated from the corridors?
- If a front drop off is provided as currently conceived, is bituminous paving the appropriate material?

o. Techniques to mitigate negative visual and functional impact

- Increase the setbacks and on all sides, and create stepbacks, particularly on the south façade, potentially on the street side (pending shadow studies).
- (See other comments in sections above).

6. Consultant shall participate in up to two meetings to include at a minimum municipal staff and the Applicant's team ("working sessions") to address the ZBA's charge to the Applicant (TBD)

7. Provide a written report and oral presentation at a second ZBA hearing related to the Applicant's final revised submission prior to the close of the public hearing that addresses, at a minimum, the aspects of the development identified in number 5 above. Said report and oral presentation shall also include recommendations relative to design-related conditions to be incorporated in a potential approval of the Comprehensive Permit, including but not limited to modifying specific aspects of the site and building design in order to improve the overall development and its relationship to its surroundings and to mitigate potential negative impacts (TBD)

In order to facilitate a more detailed review of this project, the following materials should be submitted as the design develops (some of these are already noted above):

- More detailed shadow studies that include affected building elevations of neighbors across Centre Street. Include March and September documentation.
- Expanded landscape plans that include important features on adjacent sites (patio spaces, ground-mounted mechanical equipment, etc.).
- A geotechnical report that includes recommendations for foundation types for the new structure, water table levels, etc.
- Submit a hydrant flow test.
- Provide a preliminary Building Code review. Provide detailed information regarding areas of the building with zero setback, as well as areas of encroachment (for example, ramp from rear of building towards Senior Center).
- Submit a tree preservation plan that identifies and provides strategies for protection of close-by trees on adjacent sites.
- Submit a roof plan with mechanical equipment screening dimensions, nature of materials, etc.

- Provide annotated building elevations that include dimensional strings, coordinated with proposed grades around building.
- Draft a site-specific preliminary Construction Management Plan that includes intentions regarding use of site, neighboring sites, and street for mobilization/laydown space, and accommodations that must be made to protect neighboring properties, material deliveries, street closures, construction durations, etc.
- Site diagrams that indicate day-to-day functioning of the building (trash pick-up, deliveries, etc.) as well as access by emergency vehicles.

Thanks for the opportunity to work with you on the analysis of this project. I hope you will contact me with any questions or concerns about this preliminary report.

Sincerely,

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

Clifford Boehmer, AIA