



TOWN OF BROOKLINE

Massachusetts

PLANNING BOARD

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March 19, 2015

Ms. Katharine Lacy, AICP
40B Specialist
MassHousing
One Beacon Street
Boston, Mass. 02108

Dear Ms. Lacy:

The Planning Board has reviewed 21 Crown, the c.40B proposal for the site at 21 Crowninshield Road. At its public meeting held on March 12, 2015, the Planning Board assessed the preliminary site and building design within the review parameters set forth at 760 CMR 56.04(4)c, as summarized in this letter.

Although the application characterizes the site as a transition property between the Commonwealth Avenue business district and the residential community, 21 Crowninshield is in fact a cornerstone of a distinct and architecturally coherent single-family neighborhood.

With inadequate setbacks and a large surface parking lot, the 21 Crown site plan does not provide for open space, which is markedly inconsistent with the streetscape and development pattern of the surrounding neighborhood. To better show how the project would be integrated into the neighborhood, drawings should include the streetscape in elevation. Also uncharacteristic of the surrounding context, and of residential planning in general, is the location of parking in the front yard setback, adjacent to the abutting residence. The two-way driveway at the Crowninshield-Adams intersection, more consistent with commercial use, is incongruent with development pattern of the neighborhood, which orients parking in the rear yard. By locating the parking in the rear or below the building (as done for affordable housing projects at Marion Street and Centre Street), the site could be designed efficiently to provide more open space and better mimic the current streetscape. Although this proposal is a preliminary design, the lack of provision for storing and screening rubbish and recycling containers is another indication that the site configuration and its impact on abutters must be thoughtfully redesigned.

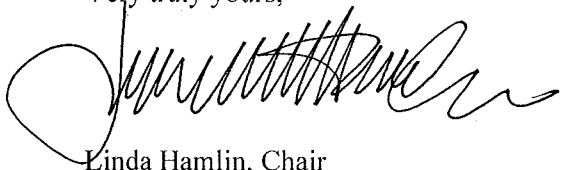
By acknowledging the proportions and the architectural styles of the single-family homes that make up the surrounding neighborhood, the project will better face the street in a residential manner. For example, because the height of the building and the scale of its roof and façades are inconsistent with that of the surrounding single-family homes, the structure lacks any relationship to its context. By expanding the footprint and breaking up the massing, it would be possible to reduce the overall height and scale of the

structure so that it relates more compatibly to the neighborhood. Furthermore, the project can be designed so that it is more sensitive to its architectural context, with elements and materials characteristic of this neighborhood, such as the use of dormers and stucco exterior.

Although integrating a multifamily project into a single-family neighborhood with historical significance is a challenge, the Town can cite several examples of how this has been done successfully. The nearby St.Aidan's development, at Crowninshield Road and Pleasant Street, is a case study in how adaptive reuse, sensitive design, and the protection of natural resources worked to conserve the existing streetscape in that district. Other districts in Brookline provide cases of how more densely built units (not necessarily affordable housing) and single-family housing can be well integrated. Griggs Terrace is part of an architecturally distinct neighborhood that consists of numerous Craftsman and some Arts and Crafts style structures built between 1890 and 1930. Like the Crowninshield neighborhood, it is surrounded by denser multifamily districts. The 1920s three-story rowhouses at 6-11 Griggs Terrace read as attached single-family housing, and their height, scale, building style, and varied roof forms relate compatibly to a neighborhood comprised of single- and two-family homes.

Although the Board acknowledged that the site can accommodate an affordable housing project, the proposal as designed is not appropriate for the site. The Board is very familiar with the housing The Basile Group has developed in Brookline, and how well these developments were integrated into the surrounding community. We hope that the proponents will work with the Town in designing a project that relates more consistently to the architecturally coherent Crowninshield neighborhood.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Linda Hamlin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "L" and a long, sweeping tail.

Linda Hamlin, Chair