



# TOWN OF BROOKLINE

## Massachusetts

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING  
AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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Mr. Robert W. Basile  
Mr. J. Robert Basile  
The Basile Group  
40 Williams Street  
Brookline, MA 02446

Messrs. Basile and Basile,

The Planning Department and the Planning Board want to express our appreciation to you and the project team for agreeing to work closely with us on design issues. Positive changes to the plan have already been made, including relocating the parking under the building, lowering the roof line at the left corner of the building, and incorporating hip roof forms and bay windows to better articulate the massing.

The Design Review Team and Planning Board hope to be able to give a recommendation to the Board of Appeals that the plans are significantly improved from the initial submission. However to do this, they feel that the massing – and in particular the height – must still be substantially reduced to minimize any negative impacts on the neighborhood.

The most recent staff meeting with the project team was disappointing because the revised plan increased the massing on the façade of the building facing the single-family neighborhood. This increase was a surprise after we had worked with the project team to reduce massing at this critical vantage point. However, we were pleased that you quickly agreed to reinstate the earlier July 7, 2015 plan (“Draft 3”), although we lost an opportunity to have a productive meeting and discuss other design issues.

The purpose of the design review process is to assess how changes to the design address the Town’s concerns and the State’s design guidelines for 40B projects. The framework for the Planning Board’s review are the conditions in MassHousing’s April 9, 2015 determination letter stating specific concerns that the proponent should address to better integrate the multifamily development into the single-family neighborhood.

We believe that we can continue working together to further reduce the massing of this multi-family building, which would make the Board of Appeals review process go more quickly and be less costly to you. Below we suggest some ideas for your consideration to make this happen.

### **Reduce the Height of the Building**

The height of the building remains a concern. In March 2015, the Planning Board initially suggested using a larger footprint in combination with partially below-grade parking as a way to both eliminate the large surface parking lot and lower the overall height of the building by at least a half story. Although the revised design does expand the footprint (with three floors of housing instead of the original four), and

proposes garaged parking, the height of the building at about 50 feet remains unchanged because the parking is on the first floor and not below grade. The expanded footprint exacerbates rather than resolves one of the primary concerns. For this reason, we strongly urge the project team to consider lowering the parking level a half-story so that the overall massing is reduced to create a more gradual transition from the 30,000 sf, four-story building to the abutting two-and-a-half-story homes.

Lowering the parking can be done in two ways: either by lowering the parking and the entry lobby together, or by lowering only the parking while keeping the lobby at grade. The first approach can be accomplished more simply, by providing a switchback ramp and steps down to a lowered entry area. Keeping the entry lobby at grade will require providing a two-door elevator and both a ramp and steps between the garage and lobby, which can be accomplished if one or two parking spaces are eliminated. The Town could consider supporting the reduction in parking to accomplish the goal of reducing the height of the building, as evidence shows that a 1:1 or near 1:1 parking ratio in projects with good transit access is not necessary. This approach might also require increasing the width of the building by 2 to 4 feet to accommodate an expanded lobby. (This would also allow for an increase in the size of the three-bedroom units, which are significantly undersized.) We can discuss how to add the increased width judiciously to minimize visual impact.

### **Simplify the Roof Form**

The roof form, especially on the front elevation, needs to be simplified, which could be done by more clearly defining the two, or possibly three, segments of the building. In addition, simplifying the roof form would reduce construction and maintenance costs.

For example, the hipped gable dormers in the center of the front façade need to better relate to the jerkinhead gable and the segments of the building below it. There is a very small offset between the living room and bedroom that results in an unnecessarily complicated dormer and roof form. Consider using a simpler roof form that better relates to the jerkinhead gable to further suggest the idea of a second attached dwelling unit.

In addition, on the left façade, the fourth floor roof line needs to be more fully worked out.

### **Establish a Hierarchy**

Establishing a hierarchy could help to organize large planes into unified segments.

#### ***Front Entrance***

The roof of the portico runs into a side wall, which means that water and ice from rain and snow will collect at this seam, creating damage. Functionally, a shed roof would resolve this practical concern. Visually, the shed roof would add more weight to the front entrance and better connect this element with the front façade. The design team felt that the entrance needs to be in better proportion with a building of this size.

Giving the entrance more weight would also establish a hierarchy and a focal point. Below are additional ways to add more weight to better engage the front entrance with other elements, both visually and functionally.

- Consider lowering the beam supported by the entrance columns so that they are aligned with the trim on either side.
- Consider ways to better connect the portico and the window above it.
- Adjust the thickness and height of the columns. As designed, they do not appear to be directly or adequately supporting the arched beam that spans it. The columns' stone bases should also be raised to align with the height of landscaping berms. We suggest making the columns wider and shorter. In

addition, a taller door and sidelights, aligned with the head height of the garage windows, would better establish the hierarchy of the front entrance. A different design approach would also be necessary if the garage, but not the lobby, is lowered.

- Soften the curve of the portico by extending it gently. The extended portico could serve as covered outdoor space for occupants. It could also serve to connect a paved walkway from the driveway to the front entrance.

### ***Windows***

Some windows are placed in accordance to their function inside the units but are not organized as a whole on the elevation. For example, the bathroom and bedroom windows on the more prominent jerkinhead gable are smaller than the windows on the subordinate hipped gable dormers, which reverses the hierarchy. They are also not located on plan as they are shown on the elevation. Consider adjusting the floor plan to accommodate more appropriately sized and located windows.

In addition, the amount of space above the windows on the jerkinhead gable is excessive and emphasizes height. It is also worth mentioning that the use of brackets throughout the design should be applied functionally, rather than decoratively.

### **Resolve the Left Façade**

The left façade could be better segmented to avoid emphasizing both the verticality of the building and the large horizontal plane.

- As mentioned above, the roof line on the fourth floor needs to be resolved. The dormer next to the projected segment of the fourth floor seems awkward, as does the narrow roof where the interior stairwell is proposed.
- The vertical trim boards and narrow segments on the façade emphasize the verticality of the building.
- The deck trim boards should wrap around the base of the columns rather than have the columns run as one continuous column along three stories. The width of this column also appears insufficient to support three stories of porch structure, and it is inconsistent with that of the brick pier below.
- It appears on the drawings that the left side of some of the decks project from the façade. If so, another treatment might be considered, such as “Juliet balconies,” which still allow for personal outdoor space. Projecting porches are not typical in the surrounding neighborhood.

### **Consider Modern Yet Historically Compatible Building Materials**

We recommend avoiding plastic, vinyl, and aluminum; however, we suggest you consider using some modern materials that are both compatible with the historic characteristics of the neighborhood yet still cost effective.

### **Provide Consistent Elevations, Plans, Renderings**

We know the plans are changing but to ensure an efficient design-review process, please make sure all discrepancies among the drawings have been resolved. On all elevations, illustrate the profiles of any overhangs and projected porches. For example, on the left-façade elevations, illustrate the profile of the front façade.

The elevations should also be consistent with both the floor plans and the renderings: On the July 7, 2015 floor plans, the front façades of the second, third, and fourth floors are coplanar; yet, on the rendering, (a) the jerkinhead gable appears to project beyond the second and third floors; (b) the dormer on the left side of the jerkinhead appears to be indented from the face of the gable and in line with the recessed

dormer on the right side of the jerkinhead, and (c) the roof of the bay window does not extend onto the face of the gable, which suggests that the second and third floors are not coplanar with the fourth floor.

In contrast, the front elevation shows the roof of the bay window extending onto the gable above, implying that the second and third floors are coplanar. In addition, the lighter-weight lines illustrating the right-façade dormer imply that this dormer is further set back, in contradiction to the floor plan for the fourth floor, and not in line with left-façade dormer. An updated roof plan would be very helpful to clarify some of these issues.

The floor plans as presented indicate that virtually no articulation is proposed on the front façade and roof line, which is a major concern. For example, does the roofline of the so-called jerkinhead gable slope or is a trim board merely suggesting a gable form? As you can see, discrepancies such as this one are significant because the massing proposed by the floor-plan configuration is considerably different from the configurations on the elevations, and more impactful than what the public interprets in the rendering.

To clarify for the Planning Board what is being proposed, please provide elevations, plans, and renderings that include the following:

- All sheets should be numbered and dated.
- Scale of drawings should be consistent so that we can align the exterior with the interior.
- Drawings should include the full extent of the profiles that will be viewed in elevation.
- Plans should be submitted a day prior to any meeting at a minimum.

#### Next Steps

Let's get together on Thursday, July 30, at 8:30 am for further discussions. Please let us know if this is a convenient time for your team.

Thank you again for working with the Planning Department and the Planning Board.

Sincerely,



Polly S. Selkoe