TOWN OF BROOKLINE
Massachusetts

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING
AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

ALISON C. STEINFELD
Planning Director

TOWN HALL
333 Washington Street
Brookline, MA 02445
617-730-2130
www.brooklinema.gov

September 16, 2015

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

Messrs. Basile and Basile,

We would like to thank you and your project team for your willingness to consider the design recommendations discussed at the September 3 design team meeting for 21 Crown. This letter summarizes those recommendations. We look forward to reviewing the incorporated changes at a staff meeting with you and your project team soon.

For reference, plans annotated with the design recommendations that were presented at the September 3 meeting are posted online at http://www.brooklinema.gov/1233/21-Crown-40B.

Reduce the overall height of the building

Lowering the parking level about 3.25 feet is a meaningful improvement: The eave line is closer in alignment with that of the abutting single-family home (a two-foot difference).

Although the ridge lines of the third- and fourth-story segments are lower, we recommend reducing excess space in the roof massing, as noted below, to improve the relative scale of the building in relation to that of the single-family neighborhood.

Simplify the roof massing

Simplifying the roof massing will not only help to further articulate the building, it will reduce the top-heavy effect of the fourth floor and in many cases lower construction and maintenance costs.

- Balance the size and roof pitch of the gables on either side of the jerkinhead. Reduce excess space in the roof area of these gables by not extending their roof form to the full height of the fourth-story ridge line.
- On all façades, reduce the size and pitch of the gables to eliminate excess space.
- If the ridge line of the third story (left portion of front façade) were lowered, it would improve the roof massing. We realize that to a certain extent the third story roof form buffers the visual impact of the fourth story roof massing behind it, as viewed from the east; however, reducing the ridge line further would improve the proportions of the roof massing especially as viewed from the south/southeast. This suggestion is intended to optimize your efforts to have a significant portion of the left façade set at three stories. Eliminating the trim at the intersection where the third-story eave line continues onto the recessed portion of the left façade will help reduce the roof massing, as well.

- The trim on the jerkinhead on the front façade projects three feet, which is excessive. Reduce the projection of the trim on the jerkinhead on the front façade and on the gables on the rear façade.
- Align or reduce trim on the right and rear façades as suggested in Planning's September 3 presentation.
- Lower the pitch of the eave returns on the front-façade jerkinhead and the rear-façade gable.

Establish a hierarchy on the front façade

Several prominent architectural elements compete for attention on the front façade. Establish a hierarchy to simplify this effect.

Portico: The front entrance is overwhelmed by the size of the dormer, which visually has more weight because of its proportions and the size of its windows. The front entrance should be the focal point, which we admit is a challenge because it is located at ground level to avoid stairs. Although the size and depth of the portico were increased to give it a higher priority, the proportions are awkward: The portico above the columns is too tall. The vestibule also projects too deeply into the front yard, which appears awkward. Adjusting the proportions of the portico and connecting it with other architectural elements are ways to give the front entrance more weight.

- Consider a shed roof and eyebrow-shaped portico. The shed roof will allow water to run off instead of collecting where the roof meets the side wall. By connecting the shed roof to the window above it and then gently sloping the roof into a more graceful eyebrow-style portico, the portico will look more significant yet maintain better proportions. We recommend a smaller window above the portico; the proposed double-height window competes with the prominent oriel windows and the dormer.
- Increase the height of the piers so that they more closely align with the siding above the foundation. Shorter columns and taller piers are typical of the Arts and Crafts style architecture relevant to this historic district.
- Reduce the depth of the vestibule; it looked better before it was designed to project an additional five feet or so into the front yard.

Windows: Varying the size of the windows creates a less static appearance; however, we suggest establishing a hierarchy, which can help reduce the top-heavy effect of the fourth story.

- Use smaller windows on the dormer; for example, use two sets of paired windows with mullions instead of ganged windows.
- Use smaller, square windows with cross muntins on the jerkinhead (see dormers on house at 12 Adams Street).
- Consider a 6/1 division of lights instead of 8/1 to simplify the number of architectural elements on the front façade.
- Add a visual support to the oriel windows, which appear cantilevered.
- Consistently use larger windows to the left and right of the oriel windows.

Improve segmentation of the left façade

The neighborhood has asked that all porches be eliminated because of potential noise and the lack of architectural context. The opinion of the Planning Board is more divided. According to neighborhood representatives, oriel/bay windows (which increase living area) would be preferable to porches to maintain some articulation on the left façade.

- As a compromise, the Planning Department asks you to consider eliminating at least the five porches on the left façade and replacing them with oriel windows, which would look more consistent with the architectural elements on the front facade. Because the left and front facades create the dominant streetscape, the design treatments of the left façade and side yard are among our priorities. In addition, despite an adequate side yard setback of 47 feet, five porches on the side facing one single-family property is too overwhelming and intrusive, even with the proposed landscaping.

Simplify the number of materials used

- Reduce the contrast in value between the brick and the limestone at the foundation. The sample of the brick provided at the design meeting was fine quality; however, a beige-toned brick that is closer in value to the limestone will look less busy. Maintain 18 inches of limestone visible above the berm at the front façade. On the left façade, the limestone should not run as high as it does.
- Consider extending the use of clapboards instead of introducing shingles on the fourth story.
- The brackets are strictly decorative, so we recommend eliminating this feature to create cleaner lines.
- Hardie-Plank cement siding with a smooth finish is preferable to a faux wood-grained texture.

Landscaping

- Use hedges instead of fences and brick piers at the perimeter of the front yard to reduce the different layers of materials.
- Mitigate the effect of the exposed foundation by using foundation plantings, in particular evergreens of various heights and textures. This treatment is especially important on the left façade because more of the foundation is exposed to the street view. Foundation plantings with a maximum height of four feet are recommended on the front façade.

Staff Meeting

We will schedule a staff meeting with the project team to review the incorporated design changes as soon as the revised plans are available. Please let us know when you will be able to submit revised plans.

Thank you again for working with the Planning Board and staff to better integrate the project into the Crowninshield neighborhood.

Sincerely,

Maria Morelli

Maria Morelli
Planner