

**Proposed 40B Housing at 21 Crowninshield Road  
Brookline Planning Board Design Team Meeting  
September 3, 2015**

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**MEETING SUMMARY**

**ATTENDEES**

**Design Team**

Linda Hamlin, Steve Heikin, Mark Zarrillo (Planning Board); Elton Elperin (Preservation Commission); Dave Jack, Barbara Sherman (Crowninshield neighborhood representatives)

**Project Team**

Robert Basile, Robert W. Basile (applicants); Robert Allen (attorney); Geoff Engler (40b consultant); Andy Zalewski (architect); Phil Pryor (landscape architect)

**Planning Department Staff**

Polly Selkoe, Maria Morelli

**Members of the Public**

See sign-in sheet.

**RECAP OF JULY 24, 2015 LETTER TO PROJECT TEAM**

Planner Maria Morelli summarized the key points of the Planning Department's July 24, 2015 letter to the project team that outlines ongoing design concerns:

- Reduce the overall height of the building by lowering parking at least 3.5 feet
- Simplify the roof massing
- Establish a hierarchy at the front entrance
- Improve the segmentation of the left façade
- Consider building materials and palette compatible with architecture of historic district

The July 24, 2015 letter can be found online at <http://www.brooklinema.gov/DocumentCenter/View/8009>

**CHANGES TO AUGUST 28, 2015 PLANS**

Architect Andrew Zalewski presented the most recent changes to the plan and a tour of the 3D model. Developer Robert Basile showed samples of Hardie-Plank siding, brick and limestone for foundation, and asphalt roof shingles.

- Parking level depressed about 3.25 feet to reduce the overall height of the building.
- The building height, measured from the grade of the front yard (including the landscaping berm) to the ridge line on the fourth floor, has been reduced to 44.6 from the 48 feet indicated on the July 7 plans. The height to the ridge line of the front left segment of the building closest to 25 Crowninshield, has been reduced to 41 feet from 44.5 feet. The height to the eave line has been reduced to about 25.5 feet from 29 feet.
- Vestible extends into front yard an additional 5 to 6 feet.
- As a result of the re-grading, a retaining wall has been added that runs from grade to about 4 feet high at the rear of the site.

The August 28, 2015 plans can be found online at <http://www.brooklinema.gov/1233/21-Crown-40B>

## **DESIGN ANALYSIS: ONGOING RECOMMENDATIONS**

The project team met with Planning staff and Planning Board members regularly to discuss design changes that would better meet the Town's objectives for the project. Planner Maria Morelli presented the ongoing recommendations that pertain to roof massing, proportions of front entrance, hierarchy of front façade, elimination of excess space and trim, and winter landscaping, among other considerations.

The Planning Department's September 3, 2015 presentation can be found online at <http://www.brooklinema.gov/DocumentCenter/View/8086>

## **COMMENTS FROM NEIGHBORHOOD REPRESENTATIVES AND MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

Neighborhood representative Barbara Sherman's comments about the proposal:

- Massive, out of scale, and box-like
- Footprint too large for site and single-family neighborhood
- Prefer to see a three-story building or buildings staggered from the front lot line
- Porches are inappropriate
- 18 parking spaces are unrealistic for a 20 unit building
- Project will exacerbate existing noise, illegal parking, and wrong-way driving

Ms. Sherman's complete statement can be found online at <http://www.brooklinema.gov/DocumentCenter/View/8087>

Neighborhood representative David Jack commented on architectural issues that pertain to scale, proportion, roof massing, window hierarchy, noise from mechanicals, screening of headlights, and the possibility that the height of front-yard plantings might compete with the front entrance.

Mr. Jack's full statement may be found online at <http://www.brooklinema.gov/DocumentCenter/View/8099>

Direct abutters at 25 Crowninshield (Janis and Rosie Bellow) consider the proposal largely out of scale, are concerned about the effect of noise from balconies on their household, want to see better landscaped screening, as well the retention of the existing hedges and assurances that their chestnut tree near the property line will not be damaged.

Additional concerns expressed by members of the Crowninshield neighborhood fell into the following categories:

- Illegal parking, speeding, and wrong-way driving especially from abutting Enterprise lot
- Potential noise from porches, Dexter Park atmosphere
- Reduce the amount of brick used, as it is not contextual
- Appearance of left-side façade (porches) does not fit in with aesthetic of neighborhood
- Street tree is already vulnerable; how will it be preserved during construction
- The siding is seven feet above grade, which is overwhelming compared to human scale.

## **DESIGN TEAM CONSENSUS ON DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS**

Design recommendations are a consensus of changes proposed in the Planning Department presentation and during the Planning Board design team discussion.

### **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, it was recommended that excess space in the roof massing be reduced, 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.

## **RESPONSE FROM PROJECT TEAM**

Applicant Robert Basile explained the importance of retaining the remaining porches. Project team is willing to consider the design changes proposed by the team.

## **STATUS AND PROCESS**

The Planning Board is reluctant to submit a support letter to ZBA unless it can review the recommended changes incorporated into the plans. Assistant Director Polly Selkoe recommended that the design-review process remain open, even if the applicant decides to submit his application to the Zoning Board of Appeals. The Planning Department will submit to the project team a letter summarizing the recommended changes and then will schedule a staff meeting once the changes are incorporated,

## **MATERIALS AVAILABLE DURING MEETING**

- August 28, 2015 plans
- SketchUp 3D model
- Samples of proposed materials

Submitted,  
Maria Morelli  
Planner