



Town of Brookline

Massachusetts

Brookline Preservation Commission

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June 1, 2016

Dear Members of the Zoning Board of Appeals,

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the proposed Puddingstone at Chestnut Hill Chapter 40B Comprehensive Permit Application. The Brookline Preservation Commission cannot support the proposal, as currently designed, to build multi-family townhouses in the existing open courtyards of the historic housing apartment complex, nor can it support the proposal to construct a six-story apartment building replacing the puddingstone outcropping on the site.

The Brookline Preservation Commission, as a Certified Local Government, voted to recommend Hancock Village as a National Register property in 2011. The commission believes that Hancock Village possesses a high degree of integrity in terms of its historic location, setting, design, workmanship, materials feeling and association. In June 2012, the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) concurred with this finding, after the Boston Landmarks Commission also submitted a National Register evaluation form, for the section of Hancock Village located in the city. MHC agreed that the Hancock Village area meets several criteria for listing in the National Register of Historic Places at the state and local level. The property also abuts the Veterans of Foreign Wars Parkway, listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2005.

The first and largest garden village housing development in the region, Hancock Village (1946-1949) is significant in part as a collaborative planning project involving the Town of Brookline, the City of Boston, and the John Hancock Mutual Life Insurance Company to provide housing for returning World War II veterans and their families. The housing complex represents an important convergence of Garden City planning ideals, Federal Housing Authority principles and practices of the 1930s and 1940s and the then newly allowed ability of insurance companies to own and develop real estate. Nationally prominent designers and firms such as project manager Gustave Ring, architect Louis Justement and Olmsted Associates of Brookline played key roles in planning the housing complex.

Hancock Village remains as the earliest documented project of its kind in Massachusetts. It also demonstrated the commitments of Brookline, Boston and the John Hancock Mutual Life Insurance Company to house the families in an attractive and welcoming environment. Paul F. Clark, at the time president of the insurance company, described the overall design concept of Hancock Village as follows:

The architectural treatment was consistent with local preference. Low land coverage, allotting only ten families to the acre, leaves generous exposure to sunshine and the four winds. A modified interpretation of colonial motives [sic] and simple proportions produce on this irregular site, pleasant effects in mass and color.

Olmsted Associates of Brookline, the internationally prominent landscape design firm founded by Frederick Law Olmsted and led in the 1940s by his son Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., designed the landscape plan, an integral part of the complex as a whole.

Nearly half the land was not developed, partly due to soil conditions and ledge, thereby leaving large sections preserved as woodland or parkland. Existing trees were retained and the U-shaped apartment blocks were sited to take advantage of views and grade changes. The plan allowed for open space courts behind and in front of the buildings. Parking was placed at street edges to avoid large parking lots or parking in front of the residences. The overall plan continued the Garden City tradition of residential blocks with separation of pedestrian and vehicular uses. This scheme also allowed for living areas and bedrooms of every townhouse to look out onto green space consisting of lawns and trees.

The current proposal to further develop Hancock Village, by building in areas that the Town of Brookline and the John Hancock Mutual Life Insurance Company mutually agreed in the 1940s should remain as open space, would compromise the integrity of the setting, location, feeling and association of the historic housing complex as a whole. The design of the proposed new buildings would negatively affect the existing architecture of the attached multi-family buildings in terms of its design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association.

In particular, the architecture of the large multistory main building is completely unrelated in proportion and height, to that of the existing buildings; it is basically a slab building punctuated by bays, and shrouded at the top by a shallow mansard roof. It will completely dominate the site, and yet it seems to be covered in timid gestures intended to mask its size. If there has to be development at Hancock Village, the project deserves a more carefully thought out, and more site specific design.

In addition, a distinctive feature of Hancock Village is that the buildings are a buffer between vehicular zones, and the courtyards. The public side of the apartments faces streets and parking, whereas the more private side faces uninterrupted green space. The Puddingstone design, fills in those greens spaces, with both buildings and parking. In this sense, it completely negates the original design concept.

The Brookline Preservation Commission believes that a more appropriate plan and design could be developed which would respect and retain the historic and architectural qualities of Hancock Village. This plan would involve applying the universal design principle of locating increased density at the edge of the site. This would allow the project to achieve several important goals of developing more

affordable housing, maintaining the community standards of the nearby single-family neighborhood, and most importantly, conserving the character defining qualities of the historically significant Hancock Village site and nearby conservation areas.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David King". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped "D" and a stylized "K".

David King
Chairman

Cc: Alison Steinfeld, Director of Planning and Community Development
Daniel Bennett, Building Commissioner
Linda Hamlin, Chair, Planning Board
Mel Kleckner, Town Administrator