



DAVIS  
SQUARE  
ARCHITECTS

240A Elm Street  
Somerville, MA 02144  
617.628.5700, tel  
davissquarearchitects.com

Brooks A. Mostue, AIA  
Clifford J. Boehmer, AIA  
Ross A. Speer, AIA  
Iric L. Rex, AIA

July 31, 2016

Alison Steinfeld, Director  
BROOKLINE DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT  
333 Washington Street  
Brookline, MA 02445

RE: 40 Centre Street  
Architectural Peer Review Report

Dear Alison:

I'm writing to provide you with a Peer Review Report in accordance with the proposal I submitted dated July 4, 2016. This report is formatted substantially in alignment with the summary of services included in your Scope of Work document included in our agreement, but I hope you will contact me if there is any additional information that you require in your consideration of 40 Centre Street.

It is this reviewer's understanding that the proponent's team has agreed to participate in working sessions to discuss other design options for addressing some of the concerns expressed by various Town Departments, as well as neighbors (some of which are noted in this report as well). For this reason, this Peer review should be considered as "preliminary", to be followed up with comments on design changes that may be proposed by the development team in response to the ZBA's direction.

**1. Review of the Developer's Application, Plans, and Drawings (and other related documents)**

***Documents reviewed (comments on documents contained in Section 5 below):***

- BOS letter to MassHousing re: Response to Notice of Application for SEL, dated March 8, 2016.
- 40 Centre Place Comprehensive Permit Application dated April 2016 (16-section binder including the PEL from MassHousing, project preliminary architectural drawings dated 04.11.2016, and other documents that may be referred to in this Peer Review).
- Landscape Plan produced by Ryan Associates dated May 3, 2016.
- 40 Centre Street presentation to ZBA dated May 23, 2016.
- Letter from Maria Morelli (Planning Department) to developer regarding additional required submission elements, dated May 21, 2016.
- Email from Chuck Schwarz with comments on proposed development dated June 1, 2016.
- Letter from Planning Board (signed by Linda Hamlin) re: 40 Centre Street Comprehensive Permit Application dated June 3, 2016.
- Letter from Robert Roth to Maria Morelli describing submission of additional materials, dated June 6, 2016.
- Letter from Robert Roth to Maria Morelli responding to May 23<sup>rd</sup> Planning Board Draft memo, dated June 7, 2016.
- Memorandum to ZBA from Jonathan Simpson (Office of Town Counsel) re: potential MHC review of the proposed project dated June 10, 2016.
- Email from Al Yerkes to Maria Morelli re: to ZBA review of 40 Centre Street proposal, dated June 11, 2016.
- Letter from Peter Ditto (DPW) to Jesse Geller dated, June 15, 2016.
- Letter from David King (Brookline Preservation Commission) to Jesse Geller, dated June 15, 2016.

- Letter from Derek Chiang to ZBA re: pedestrian safety, etc. dated June 17, 2016.
- Letter to Jesse Geller from Neighbors for Coolidge Corner re: MHC review, dated June 19, 2016.
- Letter to ZBA from 19 Winchester House Condominium Trust, not dated (drafted for presentation at June 20 ZBA meeting).
- Neighbors for Coolidge Corner Petition to ZBA dated June 20, 2016.
- Letter from Linda Hamlin, Planning Board, to Mark Zuroff, ZBA, dated May 19, 2016
- Letter to ZBA from Daniel Hill (Hill Law) dated June 20, 2016.
- Presentation of Planning Department to ZBA, dated June 20, 2016.
- "Neighborhood Concerns about 40 Centre Street Proposal" presentation to ZBA dated June 20, 2016.

(REFERENCE MATERIALS)

- Coolidge Corner District Plan dated March 2007.
- Handbook: Approach to Chapter 40B Design Reviews, prepared by The Cecil Group, Inc. for DHCD, MassDevelopment, MassHousig, and MHP, January, 2011

**2. Initial Meeting at the site with the Developer's Design team and Representative of the Town**

The development team conducted a site walkthrough on Wednesday morning, July 27, 2016, followed up with a brief meeting at 40 Centre Street, as well as a visit to a comparably sized new development designed by Cube 3 at 45 Marion Street. This building reportedly was the inspiration for the proposed structure at 40 Centre Street. Attending included Cliff Boehmer (Architectural Peer Reviewer), Alison Steinfeld (Brookline Department of Planning & Community Development), Maria Morelli (Brookline Department of Planning & Community Development), Bob Engler (consultant to the proponent), a representative of Cube 3 (architect for the proponent), Robert Roth (the proponent), and one other representative of the proponent (not all attendees were present at all locations visited).

Most of the visit consisted of walking the length of Centre Street (up to 112 Centre, and back towards the eastern end where 40 Centre is located) observing and commenting on existing context. The rear parking area of 40 was also observed, as well as the parking lot on the western side of 40 Centre that serves the high rise structure at 19 Winchester Street.

**3. Conduct site visit and reconnaissance assessment of surrounding residential and nonresidential areas within one mile of the project site.**

The site is located within Coolidge Corner, a part of Brookline well served by a high density and variety of retail businesses, religious facilities, restaurants and entertainment, as well as excellent access to public transportation (the Green Line stop is approximately 1000 feet away, bus service on Harvard Street about 500 feet away).

Corey Hill, a primarily one and two-family residential neighborhood, is immediately to the west of the site. Dense, mixed scale residential areas on both sides of Harvard Street extend to the north for about 2/3 of a mile before hitting Commonwealth Avenue, and somewhat larger scale (but still mixed) residential development is to the south off of Harvard Street. Various landscaped streetscapes and public open spaces are included within walking distance that greatly enhance the pedestrian experience. Brookline High School is approximately a mile to the south.

While Centre Street does not appear to fall within any Brookline Historic Districts, there are a number of well kept, largely intact large wood-frame Victorian homes on Centre Street (7 on the north side, 3 on the south side). Most of the larger scale, newer buildings are located on the south side of the street (the same side as the proposed project at 40 Centre), most notably, proceeding westward, a 7-story structure, a 4-story, an 11-story, and a 12-story structure near the intersection with Fuller Street. The tallest buildings on Centre Street, both owned by Center Communities of Brookline, reportedly house something like 500 elderly people.

**4. Consult with the Applicant's design team, as appropriate.**

As noted above, there was a brief meeting with the developer's team following the walkthrough on July 27. The first working session is scheduled for August 2. There have been no communications with the applicant or his design team since the walkthrough on the 27<sup>th</sup>.

**5. Provide an oral presentation to the ZBA within approximately one month of the notice to proceed.**

**Said presentation shall include comments and preliminary recommendations on the following:**  
**(the comments in this report will be presented to a ZBA meeting on August 1, 2016)**

**a. Orientation of buildings in relation to each other, and to streets, parking areas, open space, and on-site amenities, and to solar access.**

The proposal is for a single, six-story structure, with a footprint that occupies 82% of the 10,889 SF lot. Proposed setbacks from lot lines are minimal, 2'-7" at the front, 4'-10" to 5'-4" at the sides, and 5"-2" at the rear. There is no useable open space in the current plan, and no significant opportunities for landscaping. There are no on-site amenities proposed, although the application materials do mention the possibility of a rooftop patio space available to the residents.

All parking is within the footprint of the building, and accessed from a twenty-foot-wide garage door that opens directly onto Centre Street. The residential entrance is to the west of the garage door, with the lobby area taking up the rest of the footprint on the street elevation.

There is some impact on 40 Centre to direct sunlight access from the taller condominium building on Winchester to the south. The long elevations of the proposed new building essentially face east and west, which means good solar access, perhaps excessive to the western afternoon light. The shadow studies included in the submitted materials appear to be properly conceived (although see note below regarding potential errors in proponent's analysis of existing building heights in the neighborhood). Significant shadow impact from the proposed building is predominantly on the streetscape in front of the building. For the residents at 19 Winchester, visual access to the open sky and views to downtown Boston are diminished by the presence of 40 Centre.

**b. Function, use and adequacy of open space and landscaped areas.**

As noted above, there is very little opportunity for landscaping the site. A Landscaping Plan was submitted that indicates a row of Rhododendron plantings along the lot line to the east. A street tree is shown at the front of the building

**c. Use and treatment of natural resources.**

N/A

**d. Building design, massing and scale in relationship to the surrounding context and topography.**

The most notable aspect of the proposed building is the virtually flat, 6-story elevation that rises up less than three feet from the front lot line, and occupies 60 feet of the 72-foot frontage. While 40 Centre represents a continuation of the larger scale development on the south side of Centre Street, it is unique in its lack of front setback that allows a more human-scale connection with the streetscape. It has the feeling of an urban infill building, as opposed to an element in a more spacious, well-planted streetscape. As such, it is an anomaly that will prominently extend into the public's visual realm, clearly intruding when approaching from either direction. The proposed building, the front elevation in particular, has an office/commercial building look to it, which is foreign to Centre Street.

The street façade is subdivided across its width, which increases the verticality of the composition. In addition, horizontal subdivisions occur on most of the façade that tie together two floors at a time, suggestive of a non-residential program for the building. The remainder of the façade unites five stories of windows into a narrow vertical expression, extending a few feet out over the broad garage door. Because of the minimal

overall setback, articulation of the entry beyond a small cantilevered canopy is not possible, leaving the garage door the most visually important entry statement.

Perhaps most importantly, while the other buildings along Centre Street vary in scale and typology, all of them make gestures towards shaping and engaging the public realm, some, of course, more successfully than others. As was reported by the developer of 40 Centre Street, the genesis for the building is a very similar structure recently completed by the same architect on Marion Street. In fact, the surrounding neighborhood context for that structure is quite different from Centre Street, and it is not surprising that a direct transfer of that building to a very different type of site will have difficulties “fitting in.”

Many reviewers have expressed concern with the demolition of the existing historic structure at 40 Centre Street. Its small scale, generous landscaped front yard, along with a well-expressed entry, enhance the pedestrian environment. While adaptive re-use may not be realistic for the structure, consideration should be given to incorporation of some of the façade elements into the new structure.

***e. Side and rear elevations visible from the public street, public areas and from the vantage point of nearby residential neighborhoods.***

At ground level, the side elevations for most of the length of the building are occupied for parking. Large areas of the envelope at that level are reserved for providing ventilation for the parking area. Both east and west elevations feature balconies that extend into the setback space. The west elevation faces the parking lot for 19 Winchester, and is clad in vertically oriented panels, with a pattern established by color variations from panel to panel. This is the more visible side elevation, given the presence of the open, grade level parking lot. The east elevation is more subdued, with the multi-hued panels extending a little more than  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the way down the elevation to the south. This elevation is partially obscured by the neighboring structure. Window patterns are essentially the same on both side elevations. The multi-colored aspect, combined with balconies, some simply cantilevered, and some semi-recessed, along with the clear delineation of each floor, makes the side elevations more visually successful (and residential-looking) than the main street elevation.

The rear elevation that faces the tall condominium structure (and its swimming pool) on Winchester Street has windows that are associated with 5 units. It is broken into two equal, vertically oriented pieces. The multi-color cementitious panels wrap half way around, the proposed material for the other half is lapped cementitious clapboards. The rear stairwell is located in the southeast corner, with single windows at landing levels that look back to Winchester.

***f. Pedestrian and vehicular circulation***

Several reviewers of this project have commented on the issues of pedestrian circulation in front of the building, largely citing poor visibility as cars are exiting the garage. This is of particular concern given the large number of elderly residents in the neighborhood. This reviewer concurs that this is a significant problem that can only be addressed by increasing the front setback. There has also been concern expressed about the relationship of the driveway to the entry point of the parking lot across the street. An additional concern, in addition to cars safely entering and exiting, is that pedestrian movement may be impeded by large scale trash collection required for a 45-unit building.

***g. Integration of buildings and site, including but not limited to preservation of existing tree cover***

As discussed above, the model for this structure was proposed for a different site. It has not been adapted to the different limitations and opportunities that exist on Centre Street. There is no area available in the current site plan for the provision of tree cover (that would be very useful on the long, west-facing elevation to help deal with excessive solar gain).

***h. Exterior materials***

Façade material include multi-colored fiber cement panels, metal infill panels, with a brick façade indicated on the street elevation, wrapping around the western end for approximately 17 feet. Balconies are proposed to be metal, with mesh railing systems. Fiber cement lap siding is indicated on half of the south elevation, and

2/3 of the east elevation. An area of brick masonry is shown as the base on the east elevation. In general, the building has more of a commercial look than residential, with a wider variety of materials proposed than what is typical for the street.

**i. Energy efficiency**

Not really possible to tell in any level of detail from submitted materials. Brookline has adopted the Stretch Code, which will ensure a relatively high level of sustainability, at least from an operating perspective.

**j. Exterior lighting**

Not possible to tell from submitted materials. As there is very little site to light, it is likely that site lighting will be limited to illumination of the walkways on the south, east, and entry elevations. This should be confirmed by the proponent.

**k. Proposed landscape elements, planting materials, and planting design**

As noted above, a Landscaping Plan was submitted. Very little available space for plantings.

**l. Feasibility of incorporating environmental and energy performance standards in the design, construction and operation of the buildings, such as standards required for LEED certification**

No detail included in the application materials.

**m. Any other design-related considerations identified by the consultant in the course of its review**

- Floor plans that are submitted include some enlarged typical unit floor plans in addition to “fit plans”, that box out the gross square footage of the units within the proposed overall footprint of the building. It is not really possible to review conformance with some code requirements (for example, accessibility) in any level of detail. Fit plans do not indicate locations/types of proposed Group 2 accessible units. Note that all units in elevator-fed buildings must be at a minimum, Group 1 units.
- Parking plan indicates one accessible space. The MAAB will require two fully accessible, Group 2 units, with an additional requirement to provide accessible parking “...in sufficient numbers to meet the needs of the dwelling unit occupants.” This language suggests that two accessible spaces must be included in the plan. At least one of the spaces must be van accessible.
- The construction type is reportedly a Type I podium first floor, with five floors of Type III above. Setbacks are minimal on all sides. Can the proponent provide a preliminary building code analysis verifying that the building as proposed is allowable, including material selections and percentage of openings?
- Is the proposed construction type the only type that should be considered, given that it can limit building form because of height restrictions?
- Neighborhood Building Height analysis as presented in proponent’s May 23 presentation does not appear to be entirely accurate (for example, 112 Centre Street is listed at 150 feet, when its height according to construction documents is 103 feet, 120 feet to the top of the elevator penthouse). Other building heights indicated for smaller structures also appear questionable. If the inconsistencies are significant, the 3-D model and shadow studies may be misleading.
- It is possible that the Fire Department will have concerns about not having access to all elevations (there did not appear to be commentary from the building department or fire department in the materials posted for 40 Centre)?
- Is there a detailed narrative describing how trash will be handled on the site?
- There have been concerns expressed about potential structural impact of the project on the neighboring buildings to the south and east. Has this been studied by the developer?
- Given the intensive use of the site, what is the plan for stormwater management (given that Brookline reportedly does not allow infiltration structures within the building footprint)? This reviewer concurs that a civil engineer peer reviewer should be retained (as well as structural).
- Numerous reviewers have expressed concern about the very low parking ratio. Has the proponent developed any plan for mitigating this issue (diminished unit count, subsidized T-passes, shared car parking, off-site leasing of spaces with subsidized membership, targeted tenant marketing, etc.)?

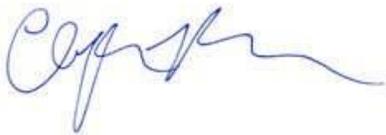
- Has the developer drafted a Construction Management Plan that describes community impact during the construction period?
- Will the developer be responsible for Town road damage resulting from heavy trucking?
- Is a roof deck included in the developer's proposal?
- Has the developer engaged with neighbors on Centre Street, most importantly the Center Communities facilities that reportedly house 500 elders, many of whom traverse 40 Centre Street?

**n. Techniques to mitigate visual impact**

- Take visual cues from existing buildings on the street, in particular, recognizing and strengthening the existing streetscape by providing a consistent set back and breaking down the scale of the front elevation with entry elements, step backs, etc.
- Consider elimination of garage door by providing rear, at grade parking, or ramping down to underground parking with a side entry to the parking floor. Underground parking option can open possibility of ground floor units and facilitate decreasing the building footprint, perhaps enabling front elevation step backs.

I hope you will contact me to discuss this memo in detail, or to talk about issues that I have failed to cover. Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Clifford Boehmer', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Clifford Boehmer, AIA