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August 8, 2016

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

RE: 1180 Boylston 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 1180 Boylston Street. I am looking forward to presenting the content of this report at the ZBA meeting scheduled for August 9, 2016.

1. **Review of the Developer's Application, Plans, and Drawings (and other related documents)**
Documents reviewed (comments on documents contained in Section 5 below):

- Site Approval Application to MassHousing dated December, 2015.
- Letter from Brookline Board of Selectmen to MassHousing re: Application, dated February 10, 2016.
- Site Eligibility Letter from MassHousing to Raj Dhanda dated March 4, 2016.
- 1180 Boylston Street Comprehensive Permit Application dated April 2016 (14-section binder including the PEL from MassHousing, project preliminary architectural and engineering drawings (various dates), Traffic Impact Assessment, and other documents that may be referred to in this Peer Review).
- Transcript from June 9, 2016 ZBA meeting.
- 1180 Proponent's June 9, 2016 ZBA presentation slides.
- Email from Katherine Gerzon to Polly Selkoe dated June 15, 2016.
- Environmental Summary from GEI Associates to ZBA dated July 1, 2016 (indicated as DRAFT).
- Email from Kyle McEachern (Brookline Fire Department) to Maria Morelli dated July 5, 2016.
- Letter from Planning Board (signed by Linda Hamlin) re: 1180 Comprehensive Permit Application to ZBA dated July 6, 2016.
- Email from Julie Gross to Maria Morelli dated July 6, 2016.
- Letter from Peter Ditto (DPW) to ZBA dated, July 7, 2016.
- Letter from David Kobes to Maria Morelli dated July 7, 2016.
- Email from Bernice Wilner to Maria Morelli dated July 7, 2016.
- Planning Board presentation to July 11, 2016 ZBA meeting.
- Email from Abby Coffin to Polly Selkoe dated July 11, 2016.
- Email from Diane Schweitzer to Maria Morelli dated July 14, 2016.

(REFERENCE MATERIALS)

- 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, commencing at about 11:45 on Tuesday morning, August 2, 2016. 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), two representative of the project architect, Raj Dhanda (the proponent), and one other representative of the proponent.

As the site is rather small, it was possible to observe all of the edge conditions, including the six-family structure to the east, the broad sidewalk along Boylston Street (with extensive overhead electrical lines), cars parked along Boylston (not obvious if legally parked), the adjacent two story commercial structure to the south on Hammond, and the two, 2.5 story, two-family homes directly to the south on Heath Street. There appear to be three mature trees at the perimeter of the site, all of which would be removed to facilitate the construction of the new building. The grade of the site drops a few feet from the adjacent commercial structure on Hammond to the Boylston boundary. East to west, there does not appear to be any significant grade change. There is an eastbound #60 bus stop just across Hammond, a westbound stop directly across Route 9. This bus travels form Kenmore Square to Chestnut Hill via Brookline Village and Cypress Street.

There was some discussion during the walkthrough regarding the parking scheme that has been proposed, in particular, is the valet-style parking appropriate for retail shop visitors. The proponent noted that the type of tenants he is seeking is not retail shops, but types of businesses where customers have longer visits (justifying the waiting associated with the valet parking concept). For most of the duration of the site visit, northbound cars on Hammond Street were backed up the entire length of the site. This was pointed out to the proponent as a reason why the loading area off of Hammond Street may not be successful (assuming that it is feasible to get permission from the Town to encroach on the right of way).

It was also noted that there were cars parked on Route 9 in front of the site, immediately to the west of where the proposed parking drive would be located. There appeared to be a potential safety hazard both pulling in and out of the drive, as site lines would be blocked by the parked cars. That immediate area is reportedly posted as a no-parking zone, which means that ensuring the safety of vehicular entry/egress at that location would require more stringent enforcement of the parking restriction.

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

The site is located on the southeast corner of the very active intersection of Boylston and Hammond Streets. Signalized crosswalks traverse both streets. To the south of the site on Hammond Street, there is an adjoining commercial structure with no side setback, or setback from the sidewalk. Beyond that point, on both sides of the street, there is mixed scale residential, with various setbacks. There is a nearby athletic facility, a cemetery, Pine Manor College, and the Beaver Country Day School. Further south and to the east is the Brookline Golf Club, and to the west, a little less than a mile from the site, is significant conservation land.

Immediately north on Hammond is the Longwood Club, and a little more than ¼ mile away is the Chestnut Hill MBTA train stop. The area is predominantly low density housing, with the Chestnut Hill School less than ½ mile away. And about a mile to the north is the beginning of the Boston College campus.

To the west on Route 9, on the north side, there is a sidewalk that is alongside about ¾ mile of commercial structures and parking lots, all the way past the front of The Shops at Chestnut Hill. Beyond that point continuing west, there is mostly commercial development with some small scale housing mixed in. The commercial development doesn't fully peter out until about .9 miles west of the site.

The south side of Route 9 (the project side of the thoroughfare), moving westward is a little different. For about .4 miles there is continuous commercial development directly on a sidewalk that abuts the road (as opposed to being set by the width of parking areas). There are very few street trees, but the sidewalk is continuous, broken only by side streets. There is a non-signalized crosswalk about 850 feet from the site. After about ¼ mile, this pattern gives way to commercial development set back something like 60 feet from

Route 9, with parking and drive lanes intervening. Commercial development on the south side doesn't end until about .9 miles west of the site.

Eastward on Route 9, there is a continuous sidewalk, with a narrow planting strip and bike/parking(?) lane separating fast moving traffic from pedestrians. No guardrail is present. There is a spotty collection of street trees, as well as some trees on private property overhanging the sidewalk. After passing a few, small scale multi-family structures and nearby small commercial enterprises, there is a non-signalized crosswalk, followed by another one about 700 feet further on. The in and outbound lanes of roadway between the crosswalks are divided by continuous steel guardrails. The quality of the walkway is variable, but does continue past the Benevolent Association, on to the health care facility about .8 mile from the site. There is a signalized crosswalk at the Benevolent Association.

The conditions of the pedestrian walkway on the north side of Route 9, to the east of the site, are variable. As on the south side, there is no structured protection from traffic, and the walkway width varies, with some stretches somewhat overgrown with trees from adjacent private property. After passing the Longwood Club, there is no commercial development for a little less than a mile (just past the Brigham & Women's facility on the south side).

Most parties would agree that there are no architecturally notable structures within one mile of the site in either direction on Route 9, nor would that stretch of Boylston be considered pleasantly walkable by modern streetscape planning standards. Traffic is plentiful, fast moving, air quality is bad, and there is no physical protection afforded to pedestrians. Other than at major intersections and parking lots, lighting is poor. Crossing Route 9 at non-signalized crosswalks is less than optimal. By contrast, Hammond Street is a much more pleasant pedestrian environment, even though it is not lined with architecturally significant structures, nor interspersed with consumer amenities like Route 9.

4. Consult with the Applicant's design team, as appropriate.
This peer reviewer has had no contact with the design team other than at the walkthrough on August 2.

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 9, 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, mixed use structure, including about 8000 SF of commercial with 45 units of age-restricted housing above (15 @ 1-BR, 30 @ 2-BR). The footprint of the building occupies 11,250 SF of the 14,626 SF site (77%). Proposed setbacks from lot lines are variable: 5'-3" along most of the length along Hammond; 2'-5" along Boylston; 20' from the neighbor to the east; approximately 6' to the neighbor to the south. There is no useable open space in the current plan, and landscaping appears to be limited to 5 street trees planted in the Hammond and Boylston street right of ways. There are no on-site amenities proposed, indoor or outdoor, other than bike and car parking.

All parking is in the basement level, and consists of a combination of valet-packed "layers" of floor spaces and stacker spaces, accessed from car lifts operated by a 24-hour manned service. The lifts are accessed from a 20-foot wide (or 17'-6" wide?) parking drive on the east side of the building that connects with the eastbound lane of Route 9. There is no loading dock indicated to serve the commercial spaces, however, a pull off area within the Hammond Street public right of way is indicated on the site plan. Rear loading for the four retail tenant spaces as indicated on the plan takes place from the Hammond pull off and/or the parking drive, partially passing through the residential lobby, mail room, and bike parking. All retail spaces have direct public sidewalk entries.

Because the building lies to the north of its neighbors on Heath Street, there is no impact as far as direct access to sunlight. There is impact on access to diffuse, bright-sky light of the height of the building and its nearness to the southern property line of the site. This is mediated by the presence of out-buildings to the

rear of the two Heath Street homes (the distance from the face of the actual residential structure to the property line is on the order of 25 feet). The proposed setback from the new structure is inconsistent in the submitted materials (the Site Plan-Setbacks indicates something like 6 feet, while the ground floor plan appears to be virtually zero setback).

The structure that suffers the most solar impact is the 6-family structure to the east, separated by about a 20-foot setback from the property line, plus approximately 5 feet additional of setback to the 6-family on their side of the property line. The submitted shadow studies indicate year-round impact on that neighbor, significantly greater than what the existing conditions impose.

b. Function, use and adequacy of open space and landscaped areas.
As noted above, the only available area that is landscaped in the proposed development is in the public right of way (i.e., street trees).

c. Use and treatment of natural resources.
N/A

d. Building design, massing and scale in relationship to the surrounding context and topography.
The building is designed to "hold the edge" of the sidewalk, extending in a straight line along the Boylston Street frontage, and then curving around the Hammond Street corner, ending by directly abutting the north elevation of the adjacent commercial building (which will lose some of its north-facing fenestration on the upper level). The aesthetic of the façade treatment, including material selection, is contemporary, with broad expanses of glass opening into the retail spaces, and the appearance of virtually floor-to-ceiling glazing in the apartments. There is horizontal banding at the floor levels, with vertically oriented wall panel and glazing systems spanning between the floor bands. Windows into the units appear to be a combination of operable awning and fixed panels (although it is difficult to reconcile the perspective rendering with the drafted elevations provided in the submission). The types of window, combined with the overall language expressed on the elevations—particularly in the perspective rendering—makes the building read more towards "commercial office" than residential.

However, as noted above, there is no notable, coherent architectural context along Route 9 that this building could arguably perfectly fit into. There exists nearby a wide variety of building types, scales, massing, setbacks, parking solutions, etc. that make this site somewhat independent of a clear contextual imperative. Clues for inspiration (and constraints) include the adjacent 6-unit building to the east on Boylston, the two-family homes to the south, the large wall of the commercial structure adjacent on Hammond, and as important, the bleak, windswept, exposed streetscape at Route 9 and Hammond streetscape (as noted in the Board of Selectman letter to MassHousing, "This area of Route 9 warrants revitalization").

Generally speaking, the building façade and massing make gestures that are responsive to its site, including:

- The first floor retail spaces and residential entry form a well-defined base for the structure, and engage the street with largely transparent storefront, articulated with wood plank screens.
- The tallest section of the façade runs along Boylston for about 40% of its length, and wraps around onto Hammond, serving to "celebrate the corner" (the words of the design architect).
- Other than the expanse of the corner piece, the top floor is set back, creating an overall tripartite composition (base-middle-top), that is generally proportionally effective, and serves to cut down on the apparent height of the building.
- The fenestration pattern changes to a finer grained, more regular look at both the eastern end of the façade along Boylston, and the southern end along Hammond. This breaks up the length of the facades, and is a look that is more compatible with structures beyond the footprint of the building.
- The setback of the building matches the commercial setback to the west on the other side of Hammond Street, and is increased at the residential entry area on Hammond.
- Route 9 is a broad enough thoroughfare, that the height of the building is not, in of itself, inappropriate.

Having made these observations, while the apparent design intent of the building is generally on the right trajectory, the fact remains that the building is significantly larger than its immediate neighbors, and has minimal setbacks (except on the eastern end) that serve to exacerbate its bulk and impact on neighboring structures. Suggestions for mitigating these effects are discussed in another section of this report.

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

The proposed secondary east elevation (the vehicular entry area), in all likelihood, would be minimally visible from public streets (at least from street level, where it is largely blocked by the neighboring six-family building). The highest parts of the rear elevations that run parallel to Heath Street will be visible above the height of the neighboring structures as the site is approached from the south along Hammond Street.

f. Pedestrian and vehicular circulation

Pedestrian entry to the building will occur into the retail spaces off of Route 9 and Hammond Street. The residential entry and lobby is proposed off of Hammond, at the southern-most point of that façade.

This reviewer is concerned about the proposed vehicular access to the building, as well as the mechanics of the parking system that relies on deep stacking of vehicles and a 24/7 valet service. Beyond the legitimate question of whether shoppers (or other forms of customers) accessing the commercial spaces would actually be bothered to take advantage of the valet service, there are some safety issues associated with the proposal. Most important is the sight line problem when cars are existing the parking drive, both related to their ability to look down the sidewalk, and the difficulty of looking west on Route 9 past parked cars, while straddling the sidewalk and blocking pedestrians. While it may be possible to ban all parking in the spaces immediately west of the parking drive, this would require rigorous enforcement to succeed. In addition, while difficult to quantify, neighbors have expressed concern about losing parking spaces on Boylston as well as commercial customers, averse to the valet system, taking up available street spaces on the smaller roads.

It is also of concern that cars may queue excessively, given the time lag associated with valet parking (blocking the sidewalk, potentially extending out to Route 9). This reviewer does not have enough information to comment on concerns related to potential noise generated by the car lifts.

In addition to residential and commercial parking concerns, the delivery needs of the commercial spaces have been questionably addressed by a proposed encroachment of the project into the Hammond Street right of way, specifically, a drop off zone near the residential lobby that would provide rear access into the tenant areas, as well as easy access to the sidewalk that leads to front entries. This proposed drop off seems unrealistic from a town approval perspective, but also potentially unworkable given the density of traffic at that corner, combined with the presence of vehicles that may partially block traffic on Hammond while delivering. The proponent has pointed out that these issues could be lessened by imposing time restrictions on use of the zone. In order for this solution to work, the time restrictions would have to be strictly enforced. Drop off could more realistically occur at the parking drive, however, as currently designed, it does not appear that there is space for vehicles to turn around to re-enter Boylston front-first.

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

As discussed in paragraph “d” above, the façade design and building massing take clues from their surroundings in an attempt to better integrate into the site. However, in the opinion of this peer reviewer, the gestures that have been made do not go far enough to tie the building in and minimize impacts on existing neighbors. Suggestions for addressing some of the problems are included in section “n” below.

While there is very little existing landscape screening between the 6-family home and the project site, the submitted site plan does not provide enough buffer on that border for more significant screening that would be appropriate for the new, much-larger structure. An existing mature tree that is at the eastern property line at the sidewalk will likely have to be removed with the installation of the parking drive. Other smaller trees that appear to be within the site will also have to be removed to allow for construction. The submitted site plan indicates 5 new street trees planted in the public right of way.

h. Exterior materials

See section "d" above. Building is clad in what is likely cementitious "composite rainscreen" panels, standing seam aluminum panels (at the mechanical enclosure), aluminum window, storefront, and curtainwall systems, and intermittent wood plank screens at the commercial level.

i. Energy efficiency

It is not possible to ascertain in any level of detail from submitted materials. Architectural narrative notes "energy-efficient appliances" and "low-energy lighting fixtures." The Application for Chapter 40B Project Eligibility/Site Approval states that "the project is designed for energy efficiency, with a goal of reducing its overall energy consumption by 20% over the baseline." Additionally, "Units will be supplied with Energy Star rated lights, and appliances and low flow plumbing fixtures." To back up any of the goals stated in the application materials, Brookline has adopted the energy 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.

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

As noted elsewhere, there is 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

See "i" above. Partial compliance with Energy Star standards is stated.

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

- Floor plans that are submitted only include two relatively detailed unit floor plans on floors two through 5 (all other units are only blocked out with gross square footage and number of bedrooms noted). Given that each floor plate has nine distinct unit plans owing to the odd shape of the building, unit layouts will be idiosyncratic. As such, it is not really possible to review conformance with some code requirements (for example, accessibility) in any level of detail.
- Locations/types/plans of proposed Group 2 accessible units are not provided. Note that all units in elevator-fed buildings must be at a minimum, Group 1 units.
- Building elevations along Hammond Street do not indicate the existing slope down to Boylston.
- There appear to be no resident amenities included in the plans (community room, work out spaces, etc.). Does this threaten the marketability of the units?
- Space allocated for bicycle parking seems inadequate.
- Parking plans do not indicate how accessible space requirements would be accommodated given the valet parking scheme. If disabled residents drop their car off with the valet in the parking drive, they would have to access the elevator lobby by travelling about 150 feet through the rear egress corridor (after entering the "back door"). Alternatively, they could traverse the public sidewalks for approximately 300 feet to enter the front lobby, mail boxes, etc. At a minimum, in this circumstance, the MAAB would require a drop-off area within 100 feet of an accessible entry…presumably the same entry that able-bodied residents use.
- It appears that the Fire Department takes no issue with the building, at least at its current level of development.
- Is there a detailed narrative describing how trash will be handled on the site?
- Given the intensive use of the site, what is the plan for stormwater management?
- While the number of proposed parking spaces is generous (80), there is real concern about the practicality of the proposed system that includes mechanical stackers and at least one full time employee present, on site 24/7 to manage them. Has the proponent developed contingencies for the eventuality of parking plans with fewer spaces, and considered means for mitigating a lower parking ratio (significantly by diminishing unit count, but also subsidized T-passes and/or membership to shared car services)?
- Has the developer drafted a Construction Management Plan that describes community impact during the construction period?

- Will the proposed HVAC system be designed to deal with the poor air quality that surrounds the site due to heavy traffic on Route 9, as well as stopped traffic on Hammond Street?
- Similarly, noise and vibration caused by heavy traffic should be dealt with in the structural and façade design.
- Will the developer be responsible for Town road and sidewalk damage resulting from heavy trucking?
- Is a roof deck possible to create usable outdoor space?
- Given the strong possibility that the proposed drop off zone in the Hammond right of way may not be approve-able, should a time-restricted drop off/loading zone be considered between the existing commercial structure and the new structure. It may only be possible if a turn-around area is provided. It may make more sense for the commercial drop off to be moved to the parking drive side of the building (with rear corridor access to the commercial spaces).
- How many parking spaces can be provided if the lift/stacker system is replaced by a more conventional ramp structure, perhaps limiting stackers to residential parking and surface spaces for commercial uses?
- The environmental report notes that dewatering will have to occur during construction, with the need to deal with any contaminants. How far down is the water table, and is the situation mitigated if the stackers are eliminated (basement ceiling height can be decreased). A shallower basement will also mean less engagement with bedrock (noted to be 2 to 13 feet below the surface).
- Are potential issues related to VOC's adequately addressed (the environmental report stated that with a parking level in place, no vapor removal system would be required)?
- What role does MassDOT have in review of the project? In addition to a new curb cut, and potentially eliminating some parking, there appears to be a need to relocate a traffic signal box.

n. Techniques to mitigate visual (and other) impacts

- Increasing the setback, particularly on Boylston, in combination with street trees and perhaps other landscaping, would provide the opportunity for a significantly more pleasant and protected pedestrian "oasis" (and would improve visibility when exiting the parking drive).
- Consider using the existing grading of the site as it drops towards Boylston street to create an intermediate patio level that provides some separation from the sidewalk (this could be particularly effective if one of the tenant spaces is a coffee shop, bakery, etc.).
- In conjunction with increasing the setback, creating a protective overhang at the top of the commercial floor will both improve the pedestrian zone and bring the scale of the building down to a more human scale. It will also make the building look less office-like, and read more mixed use.
- To decrease the shadow impact on the 6-family structure to the east, consider stepping back the top two floors of the building at the east end. This will result in the loss of 4 units, but will significantly mitigate that issue. It will also help to visually integrate the building into the existing context ("ease the transition to adjoining sites" as stated in the BOS letter to MassHousing).
- Increase the stepping back dimension at the "attic" level of the building, along with shortening the length of the "tower" element along Boylston, would help to decrease the apparent height of the building.
- It is possible to lose up to six feet in the overall height of the structure by diminishing the commercial floor to floor to 12'-6" (from 15"), and typical floor to floor to 10'-0" (from 10'-10").
- Consider creating a plant-able, buffer area on the east side of the building between the parking drive and the property line.

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,

Clifford Boehmer, AIA