

September 17, 2018

Planning Department
City of Portland Maine
389 Congress Street
Portland, Maine 04101

Design Narrative

Washington Baths
143 Washington Avenue

Building Description

The proposed building is a bath house facility on the ground floor, with a residential unit on part of the second floor. The B1-zoned site is atypical in that it provides a relatively narrow frontage relative to a larger portion of the parcel located mid-block at the rear of the site. The site slopes gently from street edge towards the back of the site, then rises more dramatically at the rear of the site. This topographic condition, along with a zero-setback firewall condition on one edge of the site establishes the basic massing of the building. A single parapet datum at the street elevation is a negotiation of the height and massing of adjacent residential and commercial properties as well as the necessary height of the continuous firewall as it extends to the rear of the site and encloses interior spaces that step up with the topography of the site.

The street elevation is primarily a masonry wall to maintain privacy for the bath house but with an oversized entry aperture that provides access to a small entry court, a public amenity “pocket park” within the building perimeter. This street-facing facade maintains the urban street wall edge of the Washington Avenue corridor while providing the urban pocket park within, which together help foster of the calm environment of the bath house facility.

The exterior materials of the building are durable and low maintenance: insulated concrete masonry units at the first- and second stories and a second story glass volume that provides windows for the residence and clerestory windows for the lower level sauna rooms. The exterior envelope design will exceed code standards for insulation. The interior structure of the building will feature mass timber structural and partition components that, as designed integral with the building’s energy strategies, will provide a model for low-carbon design. The primary fuel source for the building is Maine-sourced wood pellets that will fuel masonry heaters for the sauna rooms. The intense heat required of this system will be re-used to heat water, condition rooms, and heat the residence above the bath house facility. The roof will be an EPDM membrane, with the possible addition of areas of extensive vegetated roof for storm water management and thermal/albedo control.

Zoning Assessment

The project is designed to meet the B1 zoning ordinance.

Min. Street Frontage: *20 feet* [This site is 32'-0" wide at the street edge.]

Max. Front Yard: *10 feet* [We maintain the street edge (0' setback) per Design Manual requirements.]

Min. Rear yard: *None, except 5 ft. if abutting residential zone.* [At the rear side of the site, we maintain a 16'-8" rear yard setback at one rear corner of the building, and a 22'-2" rear yard setback at the other rear corner of the building.]

Min side yard: *None, except 5 ft. if abutting residential zone.* [On the northwest edge, we abut Business zoning, so the setback is zero on this edge. On all other edges of the site, we abut Residential zoning, so we obey the 5 foot sideyard setback.]

Max. Structure Height: *On-peninsula: 45 ft.* [We maintain a street edge of 19'-4" and 27'-0" at the two story mixed-use portion of the building.]

Max. Floor Area: *Total maximum first floor area for non-residential uses per structure: 10,000 SF.* [This building contains 4,621 square feet of interior space.]

Max. Impervious Surface: *90%* [The site for this project is 63% impervious surface.]

City of Portland Design Manual Standards

The project will be designed to meet the City of Portland design standards.

B-1 guidelines:

- a. **Urban Street Wall:** this building adds to the existing street wall front at its street edge
- b. **Mixed Use:** this building provides a mixture of uses (business and residential)
- c. **Building Entrances:** the entrance to the facility is directly accessible from the Washington Avenue sidewalk edge. From the entry court/pocket park, an accessible ramp leads up to the main interior entrance. The Portland Design Manual guidelines (appendix 2) in our design of an entry court, signage, exterior and interior lighting, and walkways. The major facility entrance is at the sidewalk edge. Exterior lighting and signage emphasize the main facility entrance.
- d. **Windows:** we consider the front façade to have depth that is experienced through the entry sequence. First, at the sidewalk, the street elevation is more solid. Then there is the entry court/pocket park. Then there is the entry façade of the inner building, which is fully glazed with the urban pocket park located between. Between the public use and activity of the pocket park, the fully glazed inner façade and its nighttime illumination, we believe that we are providing a unique type of space and activity at the street edge while protecting the serene atmosphere required of the bath house facility. This entry sequence negotiates the street and the bath house interior.

- e. **Façade Character:** the active, public portion of the narrow street frontage façade contains the primary entrance aperture, and primary/secondary entries to the building to help engender and active presence on the sidewalk. We see the entry court as a primary architectural and urban amenity that provides visual interest and activity along the street and relate the building, and its use, to passersbys while simultaneously maintaining the calm, intimate and private atmosphere of the bath house.
- f. **Building Design:** the massing of the building responds to the rich mixture of residential and commercial structures along this portion of Washington Avenue. The height of the structure responds to the eave height of the residential structure while maintaining the materials and frontage of similar commercial buildings on adjacent blocks of Washington Avenue. We maintain the Portland Design Manual guidelines (appendix 2) of a ratio of 1:2 (building height to street width).
- g. **Building Materials:** the primary envelope material is directly related to that of commercial buildings along the Washington Avenue corridor.
- h. **Building Scale:** the building matches the eave height of the adjacent residential structures on Washington Avenue. Adjacent properties on Walnut Street to the southeast rise rapidly as Walnut Street climbs its topography. As such, we have focused on the relationship of our parapet to that of the adjacent residential structures. Matching the eave height provides continuity to the street elevation and perspective down Washington Avenue, while allowing the pitched roof of the residential structures to be distinct from the commercial structures. This strategy of related massing height and datum lines, combined with variable roof conditions is consistent with the mix of residential and commercial buildings in this section of the Washington Avenue corridor.
- i. **Landscaping and buffers:** the landscaped entry court behind the street façade as well as the landscaped courtyard further back in the building provide vegetation adjacent to the street and adjacent properties while maintaining the street edge. These vegetated areas provide opportunities to help manage storm water but are also essential to the calm and relaxing atmosphere requisite of the bath house typology.

HVAC equipment Specifications

The HVAC equipment for the project will meet or exceed applicable state and federal energy performance criteria and emission requirements. The detailed specifications for the HVAC equipment will be submitted to the City at a future date when those systems are more completely designed and the exact equipment specified. As a bath house/sauna facility, there are unique energy loads associated with the building typology. Thus, there are unique energy and material strategies integral to the conception, planning and operation this building design. It is a decidedly heating-load dominated building, so no air-conditioning units are expected. Rather, most of the strategies associated the temperament of the interior climate deal with how to re-use available energy in the operation of the building.

Code Review

Please see the attached Code Review Summary for the project referencing NFPA 101 2009 and IBC 2009. Regarding the atypical geometry of this site, we have designed the building with occupant egress and first-responder ingress in mind. We provide two means of egress/responder ingress on each edge of the narrow street frontage. On the north/northwest edge of the site, a primary door and path provide access to the main building entry. This also provides egress and access to a gated courtyard that provides exterior access to the depth of the building in an emergency scenario. Given the site configuration, this best meets the requirement for two means of first-responder access to the site. The second path is on the south/southeast edge of the street elevation. This second entry zone is a service entry and an egress path from the residence and egress from the sauna/locker portion of the building.

Signage

Exterior signage is located above the main entry. A separate signage permit application will be filed with the city at the time of building permit.

Exterior Lighting

The exterior lighting for the project will be down lighting at the street edge and egress path from the locker rooms and residence, attached to the building. Please reference the attached cut sheets for the facade lighting as shown on the elevations. The building entry will be lit from soffit-mounted lighting in the overhangs above the entry sequence. The courtyards will also use down lighting.