

From: Caitlin Cameron
To: Fraser, Jean
Date: 1/22/2014 4:50 PM
Subject: 118 Congress Street comments - PB hearing 1/28/14

Because of the building's size, design strategies which include variation and articulation are important. I continue to feel, as in my previous comments, that the project is successful in this regard in its use of materials, fenestration, variation in roof line and form, and the incorporation of landscape elements such as green screens and rain gardens. The East and South elevations have improved in response to workshop comments. Staff has two further comments/suggestions regarding 1) Retail storefront and 2) Building overhangs.

The mixed-use project will ideally enhance the street wall with its active retail storefront windows and close proximity to the sidewalk. It is for that reason staff would like to see the retail storefront window returned to the East elevation which has been removed in the latest iteration of the design. For urban design reasons, any additional landscaping would be more appropriate as vertical gardens or in the furnishing zone of the sidewalk along with the street trees rather than adding landscape elements to the retail facades.

In regards to the architectural elements proposed to overhang the public right of way, unlike other exceptions where this kind of easement over the right of way was granted, this project is not limited by site constraints, existing structure, or by maintaining historical character. The articulation of the facade is a benefit to the streetscape and produces a good design that meets the design standards. If the Planning Board decides that the overhangs into the public right-of-way are not appropriate, then staff would encourage the resulting design solution maintain the current quality of design in regards to facade articulation and variation of form.

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From: Caitlin Cameron
To: Fraser, Jean
CC: Barhydt, Barbara
Date: 12/13/2013 11:56 AM
Subject: B1 comments revised - 118 Congress

Building Location and Form - As part of a recent policy discussion regarding allowable heights on Congress Street, the Planning Board found Congress Street is an appropriate location for a taller building however, being located on a topographic high point adds to the perceived height of the project. The project does exceed the recommended ratio of 1:2 building height to street width but Congress Street, as a major mixed-use corridor with transit, should be viewed as an exception from urban residential streets when it comes to determining appropriate scale and height. On Congress and St. Lawrence Streets the building does a good job of breaking the mass into proportions found in the neighborhood (through change in material and articulation).

Building Function - The standard is met with a mix of retail and residential uses.

Orientation of Buildings and their Entrances to the Street - The building entrances, retail and residential, are on the main pedestrian path of Congress Street and add to the street activity. The canopy and materiality call attention to the residential entrance with appropriate storefront and entrances for the retail segments. The bicycle storage entrance seems to have undue prominence on Congress Street.

Windows - The project makes good use of storefront windows.

Building Character, Detail, Scale, and Graphic Qualities - In general the building character fits the context. The composition of the balconies in relation to the window towers are not convincing to my eye. If the balconies are not to intentionally align with the window towers adjacent, I would like to see that slippage played up with an exaggerated gesture. Otherwise, I would prefer to see the balconies detailed so that they align visually with some of the lines of the window tower. I appreciate the variation of color and material to break the mass of the building into visually more vertical elements which is in tune with the proportions of neighboring buildings. Whereas, elevations 1 and 4 (the most visible elevations) are very successful in terms of articulation and variation I question whether elevations 2 and 3 are too flat. Typically in the neighborhood context, side and back facades are relatively minimal and flat, however, in the case of this building, these facades are more visible with 30 feet between it and the neighboring house on Congress Street, and 50 feet between it and the neighboring house on St. Lawrence.

In regards to the architectural elements proposed to overhang the public right of way, unlike other exceptions where this kind of easement over the right of way was granted, this project is not limited by site constraints, existing structure, or by maintaining historical character. When weighing the impact of this aspect of the project on the public realm the following conclusions were reached. The articulation of the facade is a benefit to the streetscape and produces a good design that meets the design standards. However, the size of the lot would not preclude the articulation from occurring within the property line. In fact, the neighboring houses appear to be set back from the property line a foot or two to accommodate bay windows and/or porch steps. Stepping the retail facades back a foot or two would not negatively affect the street wall. Another possible detriment to the public includes the drip line of the overhangs onto the pedestrian path which could result in safety and comfort concerns. The protruding bays and balconies will also interfere with the growth and placement of street trees, and therefore reduce the quality and benefit of the right of way to the public. And finally, there is some concern about the affect on the public views to the Observatory. I would request renderings that look straight up and down Congress Street to understand how far into the view corridor the balconies project and how it affects view corridors.

Signage and Building Entrances - I am concerned that the proposed locations for the retail signage will be obfuscated by projecting architectural elements such as the bays and balconies and canopy.

Development Relationship to Street - The project is successful in keeping the street wall established on Congress Street.

Parking Lots - This standard is not applicable as the parking for this proposal is provided in a garage to the rear of the project. The location of the garage entrance is not on Congress Street which is preferred.

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