

Brown Street Garage

Historic Preservation Board Review

May 30, 2017

Project Narrative

Ocean Gate, LLC proposes the construction of a new, 4-deck, steel framed, and graciously designed parking structure to accommodate approximately 261 parked vehicles. While the project is not located in a Historic District, it is sited on land adjacent to a Historic District.

Background & Project Goals

Ocean Gate, LLC is the current owner of 511 Congress Street as well as other ancillary surface parking lots on adjacent and nearby parcels on Brown, Casco, and Shepley Streets. These parking lots currently provide an aggregate total of 151 parking spaces for the use of the commercial tenants at the 511 Congress property. Total parking demand at the property, however, exceeds this capacity by over 115 spaces and Ocean Gate currently meets excess demand through costly third-party leases at private area parking garages.

The new garage will be sited directly beside 511 Congress and will greatly enhance the utility and marketability of the commercial office space at 511 Congress allowing it to better attract and retain high quality businesses and the valuable jobs they provide our Portland community.

At the same time, addressing all of the parking demands of 511 Congress in a single structure frees spaces currently leased in area garages for other commercial and residential users *and* creates future new residential development opportunities on Ocean Gate's Shepley Street surface lots.

The project will also infill and activate a vacant site that, despite the owner's best efforts at patrols and other security measures, consistently attracts litter, loitering, and nefarious activity.

Garage Configuration & Relationship to Adjacent Properties

The new parking structure on the corner of Brown and Cumberland will layer over the surface parking lot that currently exists there. In terms of grades, dimensions, and urban context, the site is ideally suited for the proposed garage which integrates into the site gracefully and with minimal impact on adjacent structures and urban context.

At the Northern end of the parcel the +/-65' wide structure will be sited in close proximity to 511 Congress for ease of access by tenants. Given the tall base of the 511 Congress building and the way the Brown Street lot slopes down from the building, office tenants at 511 will maintain their access to light and open views over the new garage.

To the East, the garage fronts Brown Street and is adjacent to another, existing parking garage. Brown Street is narrow and so public view of this long edge of the garage will be very brief and only at oblique angles.

To the South, the garage presents a narrow +/-65' face to Cumberland Avenue. As described further below, the design team has paid particular care and attention to this façade to ensure architectural definition and interest and an active, human-scaled experience. The garage will positively contribute to the Cumberland Avenue street wall as an active and well-designed building of scale and quality.

To the West, the garage abuts both a two-story, mixed-use commercial building oriented toward Cumberland Avenue and a mid-rise residential building (the Ambassador) oriented toward Casco Street. In the case of the two-story structure, the garage in-fills to its side where there are no active entries and only light secondary fenestration. In the case the Ambassador, the garage starts at a much lower grade and only affects the property at the lowest portions of its rear elevation. The garage subordinates to the mass of the Ambassador and preserves public views of the structure from most perspectives. Farther up the lot from the Ambassador the garage nestles up against an existing series of retaining walls, which conceal its lower stories and greatly reduce the vertical impact of the structure as perceived from Casco Street.

Architectural Design

Ocean Gate, LLC is highly committed to quality urban design for Portland. This commitment was front of mind when selecting Platz Associates as the project architect. Platz was selected for their proven ability to deliver garages in Lewiston and other Maine communities which look and feel traditional, light, open, and contextual.

The design of the Brown Street Garage features open steel framing, traditional architectural forms, and active, human-scaled urban edges. Particular attention was paid to the garage's most publically visible and engaging facades; those seen directly from Cumberland Street and obliquely from Congress Street. These locations were embellished with glass entry doors and glass stair towers. They will be further softened and enlivened with quality/permanent façade materials, landscaped planter beds, and through the use of well-balanced site lighting.

The design capitalizes on the steel structure of the garage as an architectural medium providing beauty in its rhythm, punctuation, and detailing.