

Libbytown Neighborhood Association
c/o 11 Stevens Ave
Portland, ME 04102

June 30, 2015

Jewish Community Alliance of Southern Maine
57 Ashmont Street
Portland, ME 04103

Re.: Future Jewish Community Center
1342 Congress Street
Portland, ME

Dear JCA:

The Libbytown Neighborhood Association (LNA) has very much enjoyed reviewing the plans for your proposed building at 1342 Congress Street. We would like to welcome you to the neighborhood and we thank you for choosing Libbytown.

As you may know, our neighborhood is rich in families but lacking in many services, amenities and gathering places for residents. We are so excited to have your organization move to the neighborhood and are largely thrilled with the plans you have shared! We love that there will be a local option for families looking for daycare for children, and a place for youth and adults to be physically active in their own community. We are also pleased that the new facility will likely be a busy place nearly every day of the week.

As an organization, LNA supports development that encourages walking and use of public transit within the neighborhood. The Jewish Community Center will likely be a very popular walking destination for local residents. It is also convenient to two METRO bus lines. We are pleased to see that many pedestrian-friendly features have been incorporated into your design:

- The parking lot is at the rear of the building. This placement preserves the existing building setback line, provides visual interest at a human scale on Congress Street, maintains a buffer between cars and pedestrians, and generally enhances the pedestrian experience in ways a parking lot at the sidewalk cannot.

- Parking is not greatly expanded, as there is adequate unused parking next door at Westgate.
- We are especially glad you are keeping the existing trees and adding additional trees, and preserving most of the green space in both the front and the rear of the property. Trees shade pedestrians, and also make the street feel smaller and thus help calm traffic.

One of the concerns we do have is that the front facade at the gymnasium, as presently drawn, is a large, blank box (Harriman Associates, Drawing A201, undated). We see on the revised exterior elevations dated June 24, 2015 that some additional embellishment has been added, but we hope for additional enhancement as well. We understand these are preliminary drawings and we hope that as the plans develop, some sort of visually-stimulating feature – perhaps a mural, or mosaic, or even large banners – will be integrated to enliven this blank area. We want to keep our streetscape interesting, fun and engaging to those who are walking by at a slower pace than quickly moving autos.

The LNA has been working hard to establish a community garden in the area, and are indeed excited to see that you are including some edible plants in your landscape design (lowbush blueberries). We would encourage you to replace other plantings with even more edibles as well. For example, replacing the dogwood tree with an apple tree or cherry tree. Additionally, work nationwide has focused on increasing children's access to vegetable gardening and we would encourage building this into the plan for the daycare facility as well.

Finally, we request that your Congress Street entrances be ADA accessible. Not all who require an accessible entrance will be driving; many will be using METRO and will need an accessible sidewalk between the METRO stops and the Community Center building, and then an accessible entrance on Congress Street. This is not only a necessity for those in a wheelchair, either temporarily or permanently, but also those using baby strollers, carts, wheeled bags, canes, walkers, etc..

Thank you for reading this letter, and for moving to the neighborhood. We look forward to our future partnerships.

Sincerely,

The Libbytown Neighborhood Association

CC: City of Portland
Planning and Urban Development Department