



Ruthanne Fuller
Mayor

City of Newton, Massachusetts
Department of Planning and Development
Urban Design Commission

Telephone
(617) 796-1120
Telefax
(617) 796-1142
TDD/TTY
(617) 796-1089
www.newtonma.gov

Barney Heath
Director

DATE: November 2, 2020
TO: Neil Cronin, Chief Planner
FROM: Urban Design Commission
RE: 1149-1151 Walnut Street
CC: Land Use Committee of the City Council
Barney Heath, Director of Planning and Community Development
Petitioner

Section 22-80 of the Newton City Ordinances authorizes the Urban Design Commission to act in an advisory capacity on matters of urban design and beautification. At their regular meeting on October 14, 2020, the Newton Urban Design Commission reviewed the revised proposed project at 1149-1151 Walnut Street for design. The Urban Design Commission had the following recommendations:

Building Massing, Height and Architecture

- The UDC commented that there is too much mass and bulk on this proposed building. The scale of this project doesn't seem appropriate. There is no transition from neighboring buildings to this proposed building except towards the back. The bulk of the building is significantly over-scaled. It looks out of place.
- The UDC was very concerned about the zero-lot line idea and discouraged it. The blank wall on the north façade facing Christian Science Church that is caused by the zero-lot line is also a concern. It was stated that the height of the building is 48 feet and the height of the blank wall is 35 feet. One of the members commented that if you need to come up with an architectural device to soften the blank wall, it is an indication that there is too much FAR to this building. It's a device that doesn't work and is inappropriate. Zero lot-line against the property to the right (Christian Science Church) is overwhelming. One Commission member noted that the Newton Highlands Area Council letter also expressed concern over having a zero-lot line.
- There was discussion about north façade, UDC asked why aren't any windows proposed on the north façade facing the Church? The UDC asked if there were no windows on the north façade due to building code. The project's architect commented that according to building code, you can have windows on 15% of the façade between 0 to 5 feet from a lot line. The

architect also commented that because of the floor plans and the size of this building, this building is built right up to the property line and hence there are no windows on north façade.

- One of the members commented it will be difficult to grow the proposed ivy on the north facing façade.
- There was discussion about the height of the proposed building and the neighboring existing buildings. One of the members asked about the height of other adjacent buildings. The applicant replied that Stevens building is 49 feet tall but didn't know the height of the buildings across Walnut Street. One of the members commented that they appreciate the initiative around the villages, but this proposed building looks out of scale. Rest of the village doesn't feel like that, it's a wonderful pedestrian-oriented village and this proposed building feels out of place.
- One of the members commented that the east elevation facing Walnut Street looks too bulky. If both corners of the east elevation were clipped at the top floor, it will help to bring the scale down, it will also help to transition better into the neighborhood.
- The UDC recommends a 3-story building, with some variation in the roof line.
- One of the members was concerned that the idea of brick on the front and one side and then everything else transfer to fiber cement feels cheap and unfortunate.
- Another member commented about the front east elevation facing Walnut Street. There are three separate treatments of the front façade, it was probably planned to break the façade a bit more. All three have different brick treatment, different window treatment, and different balcony treatment. They are all sitting on a lintel and the one to the right has one leg supporting it. The right part of the front elevation looks like it is sitting on one little column and although it will be structurally sound, visually it needs to have a something more to hold the stories above it. The UDC recommends adding a visual element to the right side of the building (at the garage entrance).
- The member commented that if the applicant were to lower the density of the project, they can consider to setback the upper floors, may be 2nd floor or 3rd floor. It will help to reduce the scale on the front of the street, so it doesn't look as massive.
- One of the members commented that between both the elevations presented, the first elevation (with vertical siding) was preferable. It had a very traditional form yet was rendered in a modern way. If the applicant decided to go with brick façade, the applicant is encouraged to not make it look like a 19th century building.

Parking

- One of the members commented that green fence is nice and recommends continuing it all the way around the parking on all sides, so all the parking is screened. However, another member commented that the green fence is a device to fix a problem that should not be created.
- There was also decision about electric charging stations for cars and bicycles. The UDC recommended to provide more than 1 electric car charging station.
- One of the members commented that the fact that the applicant is seeking a huge parking waiver (1:1 parking is not available for the units) is an indication that there is too much bulk on this building and too many units proposed.

Retail Space

- There was discussion about the retail space also. The UDC had questions about where the main entrance to the retail space was. The applicant commented that the primary entrance for the retail space will be from the main entry vestibule (shared lobby) and the secondary egress from the retail space is the door facing Walnut Street. The applicant also commented that they are open to different retail options for this space, but restaurant may be a possibility. From an urban design point of view, the UDC recommended to provide the primary entrance to the retail space from the street and not from the shared lobby. One of the members commented that the proposed awning looks too small, this is a great opportunity to have doors/full length windows that can be fully open in the summer, which creates an air flow that is very desirable, especially if the sidewalk will remain as wide as it is today. This is a great way to liven up the sidewalk and this restaurant can be a principal destination. It feels very boxed-in and tight as it is proposed.

There were a few community members also present at the meeting. Mr. Ned Crecelius, representing Christian Science Church at 1141 Walnut Street (north side abutters) had a few comments. He commented that the Commission members had made most of the points that he was going to make. Mr. Crecelius had the following comments:

- Mr. Crecelius commented that the proposal is so dense that you need to drive through it to get to the parking which is an issue.
- He also commented that the 30 feet x 48 feet blank wall on the church property is a major concern. There was a shade study done by a Babson Physics Professor. A huge impact on the church will be that Sunday morning services will not receive direct sunlight anymore. He mentioned that the developer approached the church last spring and asked if the church will give up property line rights then the developer will put windows for them. When the Church didn't sign the appease and Newton Highlands Area Council also raised concerns, the applicant came back with the idea of a "green wall". If the applicant were to grow ivy on the north side facing the church, the only way to access that wall will be through the church site. This blank wall will also decrease the property value for the church substantially.