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STAFF MEMORANDUM

Meeting Date: **Wednesday, March 9, 2022**
DATE: March 4, 2022
TO: Urban Design Commission
FROM: Shubee Sikka, Urban Designer
SUBJECT: **Additional Review Information**

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide the members of the Urban Design Commission (UDC) and the public with technical information and planning analysis which may be useful in the review and decision-making process of the UDC. The Department of Planning and Development’s intention is to provide a balanced view of the issues with the information it has at the time of the application’s review. Additional information may be presented at the meeting that the UDC can take into consideration when discussing Sign Permit, Fence Appeal applications or Design Reviews.

Dear UDC Members,

The following is a brief discussion of the sign permit applications that you should have received in your meeting packet and staff’s recommendations for these items.

I. Roll Call

II. Regular Agenda

Sign Permits

1. 1081 Washington Street – All Renewable Energy

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: The property located at 1081 Washington Street is within Business 2 zoning district. The applicant is proposing to install the following sign:

1. One wall mounted principal sign, internally illuminated, with approximately 31 square feet of sign area on the southern facade facing Washington Street.

TECHNICAL REVIEW:

- The proposed wall mounted principal sign appears to be consistent with the dimensional controls specified in §5.2.8. Per the Zoning Ordinance, one principal sign is allowed, which the applicant is not exceeding, and on this façade of 47 feet, the maximum size of the sign allowed is 100 sq. ft., which the applicant is also not exceeding.
- UDC’s decision at February meeting:
 1. Recommended “Inc” be removed from the sign.
 2. Approved the proposed sign on the condition that the sign band be moved and centered between the bottom and top window.
- Updates from the applicant since February meeting:
 1. Applicant has removed the “Inc” and resubmitted a revised sign.
 2. Applicant would like to discuss the location of the sign at this meeting.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends approval of the proposed principal sign.

2. 2-8 Hartford Street – The Dining Car Café & Market

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: The property located at 2-8 Hartford Street is within Business 1 zoning district. The applicant is proposing to install the following sign:

1. One awning mounted principal sign, externally illuminated, with approximately 98 square feet of sign area on the northwestern facade facing Hartford Street.

TECHNICAL REVIEW:

- The proposed awning mounted principal sign appears to be consistent with the dimensional controls specified in §5.2.8. Per the Zoning Ordinance, one principal sign is allowed, which the applicant is not exceeding, and on this façade of 37 feet, the maximum size of the sign allowed is 100 sq. ft., which the applicant is also not exceeding.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends approval of the proposed principal sign.

3. 845 Washington Street - Chase

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: The property located at 845 Washington Street is within Mixed Use 4 zoning district and has a comprehensive sign package approved by UDC on February 10, 2021 (attachment A). The applicant is proposing to install the following signs:

1. One wall mounted principal sign, internally illuminated, with approximately 26 sq. ft. of sign area on the southern building façade facing Washington Street.
2. One perpendicular blade secondary sign, non-illuminated, with approximately 4 sq. ft. of sign area on the southern building façade perpendicular to Washington Street.

3. One wall mounted secondary sign, internally illuminated, with approximately 26 sq. ft. of sign area on the northern building façade facing the rear parking lot.
4. One perpendicular secondary blade sign, non-illuminated, with approximately 4 sq. ft. of sign area on the western building façade perpendicular to the rear parking lot.

TECHNICAL REVIEW:

- The proposed wall mounted principal sign appears to be not consistent with the Comprehensive Sign Package (CSP). Per the CSP, one principal sign is allowed, which the applicant is not exceeding, and the maximum size of the sign allowed is 60 sq. ft., which the applicant is also not exceeding. However, the proposed sign does not appear to be consistent with the approved sign band, it is above the approved sign band.
- Both the proposed perpendicular blade signs appear to be consistent with the CSP. Per the CSP, two blade signs are allowed, which the applicant is not exceeding, and the maximum size of each blade sign allowed is 9 sq. ft., which the applicant is also not exceeding.
- The proposed wall mounted secondary sign appears to be consistent with the CSP. Per the CSP, one secondary sign is allowed, which the applicant is not exceeding, and the maximum size of the sign allowed is 35 sq. ft., which the applicant is also not exceeding. The UDC approved the CSP on the condition that all signs facing the parking lot shall be dimmable.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends approval of both the blade signs as submitted and the secondary sign on the **condition** that the sign is dimmable. Staff seeks recommendation from UDC regarding the principal sign facing Washington Street.

4. 191 Sumner Street – Elite Spa

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: The property located at 191 Sumner Street is within a Business 1 zoning district. The applicant is proposing to install the following sign:

1. One wall mounted principal sign, non-illuminated, with approximately 8 sq. ft. of sign area on the southern building façade facing the parking lot.

TECHNICAL REVIEW:

- The proposed wall mounted principal sign appears to be consistent with the dimensional controls specified in §5.2.8. Per the Zoning Ordinance, one principal sign is allowed, which the applicant is not exceeding, and on this façade of 40 feet, the maximum size of the sign allowed is 100 sq. ft., which the applicant is also not exceeding.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends approval of the proposed principal sign.

Design Consistency Review

1. 355 & 399 Grove Street – Riverside Design Consistency Review

The Subcommittee reviewed Riverside for Design Consistency on February 2nd and 23rd for Buildings 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, and 10. Staff is still preparing the memorandum with recommendations from the meetings. Staff intends to have it ready before the meeting and will be sent to the Commission before the meeting via email.

Comprehensive Sign Package

1. 1-55 Boylston Street – The Street

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: The property located at 1-55 Boylston Street is within Business 4 zoning district and has a comprehensive sign package authorized by a special permit via Board Order # 417-12(2).

The Street Comprehensive Sign Package was first developed and approved through special permit in February of 2013. The package was amended in April of 2020 with a refreshed set of free-standing signs and re-organized set of wall sign elevations. The applicant is coming back for a second amendment to add tenant and wayfinding signage for 27 Boylston Street. The current proposal reflects the additional tenant and wayfinding signs for 27 Boylston Street. It also includes updated elevations for each of the buildings at The Street with new sign bands that correspond to the architectural elements of each current storefront façade. At the recommendation of the planning department, the updated elevations and sign bands were developed and are included to make the plans clearer and to streamline the tenant signage review process.

The applicant is proposing to amend the special permit for the following signs:

1. One free-standing directory sign, internally illuminated, with approximately 15 sq. ft. of sign area west of 27 Boylston Street (sign E5).
2. One free-standing directory sign, internally illuminated, with approximately 15 sq. ft. of sign area south of 27 Boylston Street (sign E10).
3. One free-standing directory sign, internally illuminated, with approximately 15 sq. ft. of sign area north of 27 Boylston Street (sign E11).
4. One free-standing vehicular directional sign, non-illuminated, with approximately 6 sq. ft. of sign area southwest of 27 Boylston Street (signs K4).
5. One free-standing vehicular directional sign, non-illuminated, with approximately 6 sq. ft. of sign area east of 27 Boylston Street (sign KD15).

6. One wall mounted placemaking principal sign, illuminated, with approximately 183 sq. ft. of sign area on the southern façade of 27 Boylston Street (sign N).

The applicant is proposing the following signs that do not require an amendment to the special permit:

7. One free-standing pedestrian directional sign, non-illuminated, with approximately 2 sq. ft. of sign area west of 27 Boylston Street (signs G2).
8. One free-standing pedestrian directional sign, non-illuminated, with approximately 1 sq. ft. of sign area west of 27 Boylston Street (sign M2).
9. One wall mounted pedestrian directional sign, non-illuminated, with approximately 2 sq. ft. of sign area on the western façade of 27 Boylston Street (sign O).

The applicant has also submitted sign bands and tenant sign locations for 25 Boylston Street which were not included in the previous packages.

The applicant has also submitted revised sign bands and tenant sign locations for all other buildings.

TECHNICAL REVIEW:

- The signs numbered from 1 to 6 in the above list do not appear to be consistent with the dimensional controls specified in §5.2.8. The applicant will need to apply for a Special Permit to the City Council for these signs.
- The signs numbered 7 to 9 in the above list appear to be consistent with the dimensional controls specified in §5.2.8 and are allowed by right and do not require a special permit.
- Staff seeks recommendation from UDC regarding the sign bands and tenant sign locations for 25 Boylston Street. 25 Boylston Street was not included in the previously approved comprehensive sign package.
- Staff seeks recommendation from UDC regarding the revisions to the sign bands and tenant sign locations for all buildings.
- The applicant has made the following **updates** since the last meeting:
 - Created a separate sign band in a different color that allows Blade Signs only.
 - Hatched a “future sign band” on the West and North facades of the former Tender Greens space at 49 Boylston.
 - For the “Welcome to the Street” sign, the applicant has included two options. One is a smaller version of the full “Welcome to the Street” sign that was presented last time. Another one is a sign that just says, “The Street.” The applicant would like to discuss both the options at the meeting.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Staff seeks recommendation regarding all the signs from UDC to the Land Use Committee of the City Council.

Design Review

1. 106 River Street

The 106 River Street project consists of the construction of a three-story, 9-unit multi-family dwelling with 11 ground level tenant parking stalls. The tenant parking stalls will be located within an open carport adjacent to the dwelling units they serve. Two open air visitor parking spaces will be provided. The proposed three-story building contains approximately 15,762 square feet creating an FAR of 1.0 which is allowable by right. The townhomes are designed as live/ work residences with office space on the first floor and residential space on the upper floors. One unit is designed to be adaptable for handicapped accessibility including space for a future lift.

This project was last reviewed by UDC in September 2021. Attachment B includes the memo from that meeting. Since the project's last design iteration, the following changes have been made:

- The dwelling unit count has increased from 6 to 9 to provide smaller, more attainable units
- Unit areas have decreased with the typical unit at approximately 1,550 SF. Two larger units at approximately 1,740 SF are provided.
- Parking stalls reduced from 14 to 13 (Including visitor spaces). 1 handicapped accessible space provided.
- Parking stalls designated as EV ready
- Tenant parking will be in an open carport instead of private garages
- The raised courtyard has been removed
- The paseo access to parking from Elm Street has been removed
- The entry access drive has been widened to accommodate two-way traffic
- The FAR has been reduced from 1.17 to 1.0
- The ridge height of the Elm Street facing units has been raised from 134'-6" to 137'-6" in alignment with the ridge height of the River Street facing units.

At the request of the Planning Department, the petitioner has been asked to present the revised project proposal to the UDC for consideration. The Planning Department encourages the UDC to review the project with regards to, but not limited to, the following: the proposed site plan; the building's design; bulk and massing; and relationship to context and the street.

2. 34, 36, 38, and 48 Crafts Street and 19 and 21 Court Street

The applicant is proposing an elder housing with services facility. The facility will include a total of 209 units of:

- independent living (129 units),
- assisted living (52 units), and
- memory care (28 units).

There will be 146 parking spaces (136 in the garage and 10 surface spaces). The project will require a special permit as well as a zone change to allow the use.

At the request of the Planning Department, the petitioner has been asked to present the revised project proposal to the UDC for consideration. The Planning Department encourages the UDC to review the project with regards to, but not limited to, the following: the proposed site plan; the building's design; bulk and massing; and relationship to context and the street.

Attachments

- Attachment A: 845 Washington Street - Trio Comprehensive Sign Package
- Attachment B: 106 River Street Design Review Memo

Washington Place, Newton

Site and Tenant Signage

UPDATED: 4/9/21

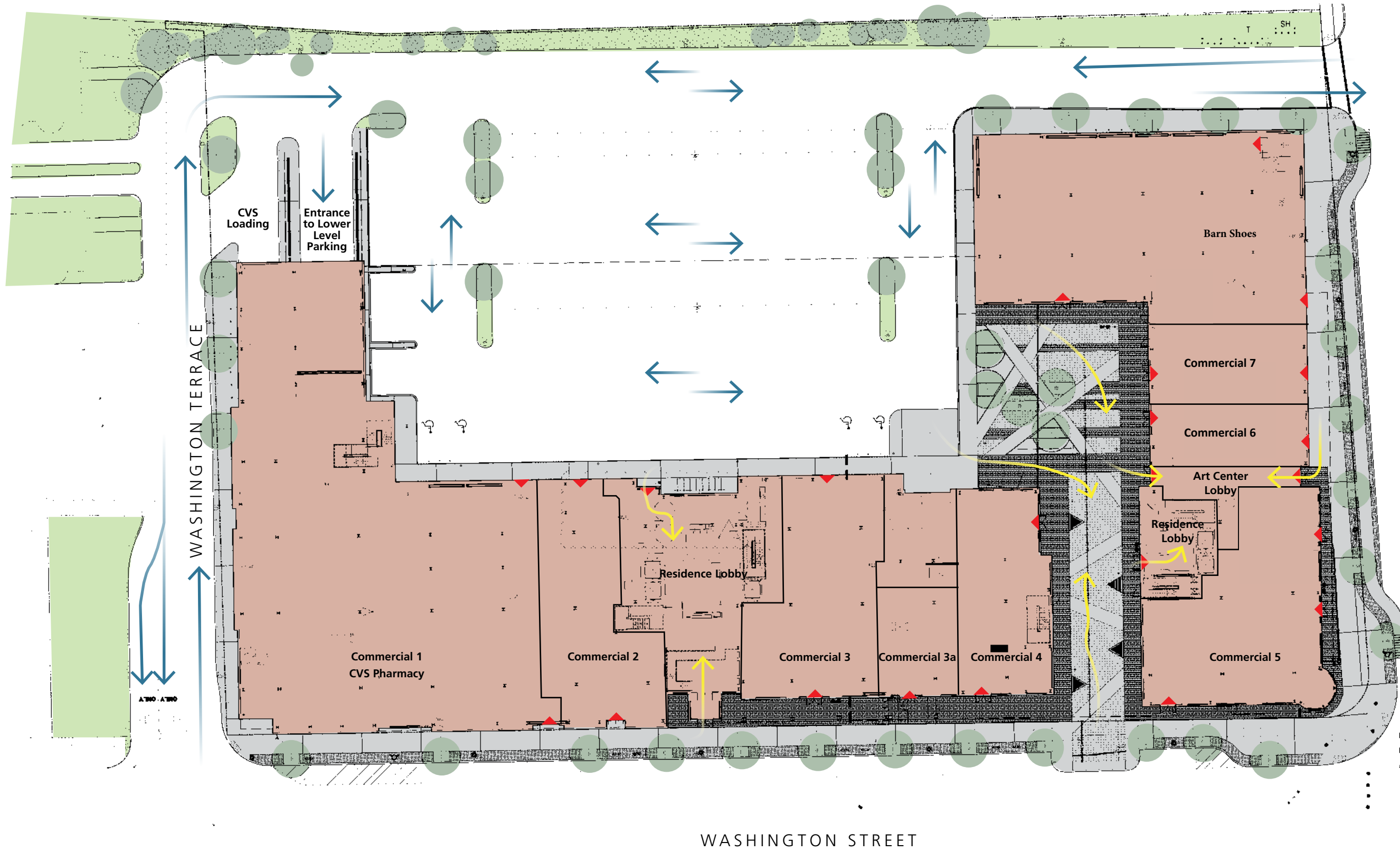



Roll Barresi & Associates

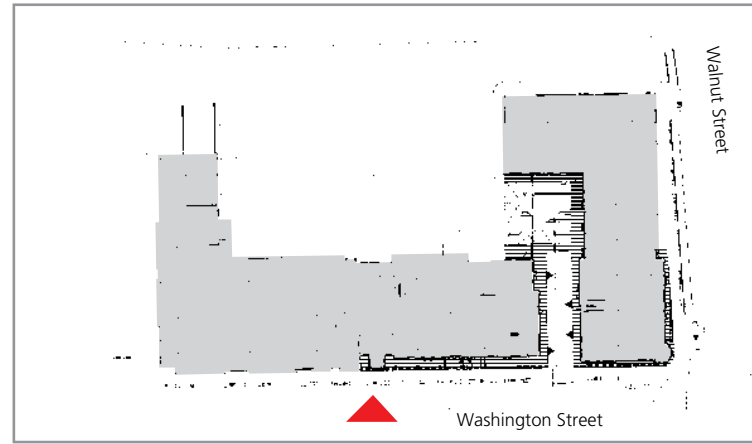
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LEGEND

- ← Vehicular Circulation
- Pedestrian Circulation
- ▲ Building Entrances



1" = 40 ft. 

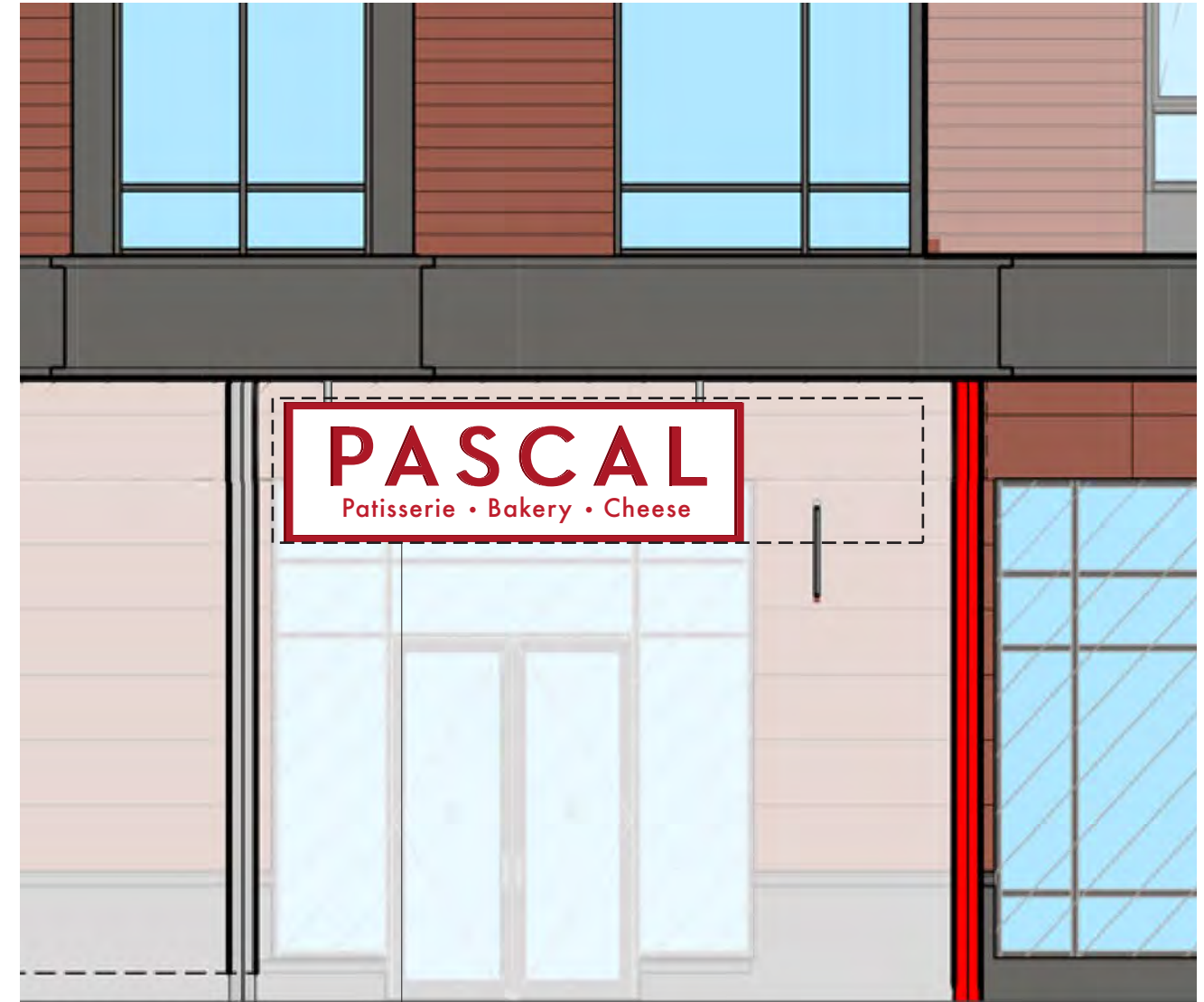


Key Plan



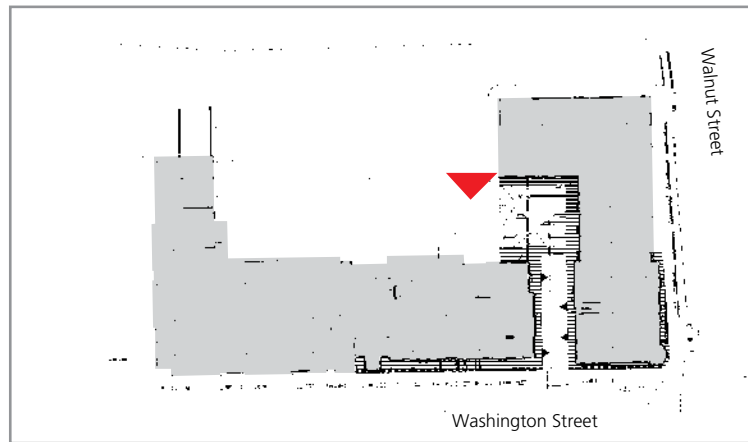


SIGN BAND AREA
60sf. max. (15'x 3'-4" shown)



Elevation
1/4" = 1'-0"

SIGN BAND AREA
60sf. max. (15'x 3'-4" shown)



Key Plan

Commercial Tenant 2: 35'-0" Frontage

Secondary Sign: 35sf max
 (11' x 3'-1" sign shown = 35sf)
 Plus Storefront Blade Sign



Elevation
 1/8" = 1'-0"

SECONDARY SIGN
 10.5 SF (6'-0" x 1'-9")

SIGN BAND AREA
 35 sf. max. (11'-0" x 3'-1" shown)

SECONDARY SIGN
 Storefront Blade Sign



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Barney Heath
Director

DATE: October 22, 2021
TO: Neil Cronin, Chief Planner
FROM: Urban Design Commission
RE: 106 River Street
CC: Land Use Committee of the City Council
Barney Heath, Director of Planning and Community Development
Jennifer Caira, Deputy Director
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 September 22, 2021, the Newton Urban Design Commission reviewed the proposed project at 106 River Street for design. The Urban Design Commission had the following comments and recommendations:

The UDC commented that this is an interesting, skillful project on a tough, corner site. It is great seeing a scheme that doesn't have garages/driveways in the front.

Site Plan, Circulation and Connectivity

- There was discussion about the parking underneath the courtyard and its access. Looking at the plans closely, it was clear that it is built as a wall so the only entrance for the parking garage to units A, B, and C is through the small entrance shown as dotted lines on the first-floor plan between units D and E. The Commission commented that functionally, it may create a problem to have a small entrance to private garages. For example, if a resident in unit C wanted to take their car for a short trip, they will need to back out, go all the way across the garages for units A and B, pivot, and then go through that one little opening, then turn and finally get to the street. That will be an annoyance. The applicant responded that it was a recommendation from one of the Ward Councilor that they thought it would be better to have that as an opening and each unit would have their own door for safety. The applicant also commented that they looked at all the turning radii and it works. They had to give a little here so there are no garages facing the street. The Commission commented that they are supportive of the way it looks both on Elm Street and River Street. It's a visual problem when cars come off the street or physical problem when they go through this sort of back entrance.

- The UDC asked if the existing electric poles will stay and if they block any entrances? The applicant responded that they don't believe they will block any entrance but will investigate and confirm that. The applicant also mentioned that the Special Permit process may require under-grounding.

Building Massing, Height and Architecture

- The Commission commented regarding Elm Street elevation, the architecture is good and elevated private space is good, but it is a long building. The covered parking in a way is good but would have preferred to see a landscaped green opening in keeping with the neighborhood. The existing building across the street is quite different, building shape may be similar but the site plan and massing is quite different. Hiding of the parking is skillfully executed but there is limited driveway space and probably not much space to provide landscape screenings for the abutters who will be seeing the driveway and parking. Will there be any fencing or landscaping to deal with it? Is there any additional roof equipment or protrusions through the roof that may be visible? In the massing, there was a linking piece at the second level, what is that? The applicant responded that the idea behind the linking piece is to create a courtyard space. The applicant mentioned that they have been talking to the 3 Ward Councilors and one of the comments that came up early on is that this didn't feel like a courtyard space but felt like an open deck and by enclosing it, it felt more like a bungalow and it gave a scale to this courtyard, it is usable living unit space.
- The Commission asked where the entrance to the corner unit is. The applicant responded that it is under the porch and the entire porch will belong to that unit. The Commission commented that the porch doesn't feel right. The applicant responded that it could be because the porch needs a plinth or a deck, so it ties more with the building than just sitting on the ground in the landscape. Another option will be to make the porch smaller. The applicant also mentioned that the openness of the porch was to improve the visibility at the intersection. The Commission commented that the porch may be too grand for that corner. The applicant responded that they would investigate it and may be tone it down a little.
- The Commission asked if there is an egress from the raised courtyard? The applicant responded that they are from within each unit and are considering providing a stairway from the top to the back or to the garage. The applicant also said that they first thought of providing a staircase in the front (as shown in some of the drawings) but are going to remove it due to safety reasons. The Commission commented that it is probably a good idea since the staircase doesn't fit well with the elevation.

Landscape, Streetscape and Public Open Space

- The Commission also commented that the corner is important, and it is good that safety has been considered. It's going to be very important to look at the landscape plants to make sure there is no growing understory so there's visibility which is a tremendous improvement from the existing condition of the site. The applicant mentioned that the landscape architect is Tom Ryan, from Ryan Associates who did the landscape for the project across the street, they will be putting a lot of time and effort in the landscaping.
- The Commission asked how many bedrooms these units are typically? The applicant responded that they will be a mix of unit sizes, 2, 3, or 4 bedrooms. The Commission commented that some of these units will probably have children because of the unit size. There's no place for them to play. There needs to be some green open space. The applicant responded that there is West

Newton Playground on Elm Street, with a very significant tot lot, it is within a 5-minute walking distance. The Commission responded that is good, but parents won't be able to look out their window and watch while the kids play outside the kitchen. The architecture is great, and the concept is great, but no open space is a major drawback.

- There was discussion about the gravel area in the northeast part of the site. What's happening in that area? The applicant responded that they would investigate about providing a play space in that area. There is also a south facing space that may work as well.
- The Commission commented that it may help to have 1 more curb cut. The applicant responded that the only place to provide it would be at River Street but would defeat the purpose of using that space as a play space. The Commission suggested that a second curb cut could be provided if it were 2 buildings, so the curb cut could be in the middle of both the buildings. The applicant responded that zoning doesn't allow for 2 buildings in this zone, there is no avenue to seek that kind of relief.
- The Commission asked if it is required to provide visitor parking and the applicant responded that they are not required to provide visitor parking. It might help to not provide visitor parking, there are plenty of on-street parking spaces.

The Commission commented that there are two weak points from visual standpoint, first is the connector between the two buildings (the one along Elm St. and the other along River Street) with the door and the stair, it feels funny. The second weakness is the plinth that happens above the drive to four of the six parking garages.

The UDC commented that there may be too many units at this site. One less unit will give a lot more flexibility to the site plan and parking. A plan with five units could be very different, has different qualities and meets the street in a similar way. The applicant responded that as a developer there are financial aspects to consider, six units is the amount that is required to do the type of architecture and quality work.