

From: Bermudes <bermudes@verizon.net>
To: "klynema@town.arlington.ma.us" <klynema@town.arlington.ma.us>, "rzsembery@town.arlington.ma.us" <rzsembery@town.arlington.ma.us>
Date: Mon, 25 Jul 2022 13:40:46 +0000 (UTC)
Subject: Letter re: Docket # 3704 - 18-20 Belknap Street.

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CAUTION: This email originated from outside your organization. Exercise caution when opening attachments or clicking links, especially from unknown senders. Hello Kelly, Rachel and members of the Arlington Redevelopment Board.

We are submitting the attached for your review, consideration and addition to documents for the meeting tonight re: Docket # 3704 relative to 18-20 Belknap Street.

We appreciate your work and the complexity and uniqueness of this case that is likely taking additional time and consideration from the board. Thank you.

Deb & Peter Bermudes
19 Belknap Street

To: The Arlington Redevelopment Board

From: Deb & Peter Bermudes, 19 Belknap Street, Arlington

Date: July 25, 2022

RE: Docket #3704 18-20 Belknap Street

We appreciate your work and the complexity and uniqueness of this case that is likely taking additional time and consideration from the board. Thank you.

In the interest of time we have copied the ‘updated memo re: docket #3704’ dated July 21, 2022 and bolded our concerns below for clarity.

- *A site plan demonstrating that the prior existing conditions (pre-construction) had 0% usable open space – include dimensions.*
The updated site plan demonstrates that the front yard dimensions were 19.5 feet deep by 41.3 feet wide, which does not meet the requirements for usable open space. Prior to construction the rear yard was completely paved with impervious paving materials.

How does the above not comply? The former front yard plus the front porch that spanned the width of the building were useable open space pre-construction. In addition, the prior backyard space allowed for only 6 cars to park (2 fewer than the applicant plans to have) and the remainder of the back yard space was useable open space. To suggest there was “0” is not only incorrect but appears disingenuous and self-serving.

- *Building footprint dimensions for existing and new on sheet A-03*
Existing floor plans and dimensions have been provided on Sheet A-04, and proposed floor plans and dimensions have been provided on Sheets A-07, A-08, and A-09.
- *Floor area dimensions broken down by level (basement through half story) illustrating how they were calculated*
Existing floor area dimensions and FAR have been provided on Sheet A-04, and proposed floor area dimensions and FAR calculations have been provided on Sheet A- 07.
- *Building height dimensions on sheet A-06; dimensions should be consistent with those provided on the Open Space/Gross Floor Area Information worksheet.*
Existing building heights have been provided on Sheets A-05 and A-06. The proposed building height has not been identified on Sheets A-10 and A-11.

It is curious and frustrating that the actual building height was not provided to the board as requested. Comparing the prior building to the current building: renderings of prior building start with 0 at grade level (as would be expected) and have the first floor starting at 2’10” above ground for a total height of 31’9”.

Renderings of the new building document “0” at the level of the first floor which is elsewhere noted to be 3’10” above the ground. This is inconsistent at best and deliberately deceptive at worst. Bottom line: the height of the building appears to be greater than the 35’ maximum allowed in an R2 district in addition to being a significant difference from the previous building, and given its proximity to the sidewalk, it is imposing.

Can ISD confirm the actual height rather than our relying on the developer to provide accurate numbers?

In addition, it appears the basement ceiling was actually raised by a foot – not sure but it sounds like a complicated process that may have required additional oversight from ISD?

- *Third story plans and elevations showing the upper story dimensions: include dimensions in square feet of which areas have a floor to ceiling height of greater than and less than 7’ 0”, include roof slope on elevation (note the required roof slope of a minimum of 2:12) and an illustration and calculation of compliance with the 1/2 story requirements*
The upper story dimensions are provided on Sheet A-05, demonstrating that the half story is less than 50% of the second floor area. The roof slope dimensions provided on Sheet A-11 indicated that the proposed dormers meet the minimum 2:12 roof slope requirement described in the definition of a half story.

The applicant’s diagram relative to the third floor (containing master bedroom & bath and storage), seems to indicate ceiling heights in violation of Massachusetts Building Code, specifically 1208.2 Minimum Ceiling Heights:

Occupiable spaces, habitable spaces and corridors shall have a ceiling height of not less than 7 feet 6 inches (2286 mm). Bathrooms, toilet rooms, kitchens, storage rooms and laundry rooms shall be permitted to have a ceiling height of not less than 7 feet (2134 mm).

Can these measurements be verified by ISD?

It would appear that these plans can’t, as written, meet both Mass. Building Code AND the definition of “half-story.” Here is another example that makes it appear and feel like the developer is not necessarily being upfront.

Relative to the slope, it should be noted that the diagram submitted by the Applicants for the 7/11/22 meeting indicated 1:12 slope. The diagram submitted for the current 7/25/22 meeting indicates 2:12 slope.

Have these structural changes actually been made on the building or just on paper? If there have been modifications, who verified their completion? Living across from the project we have seen no recent roof work being done.

- *Updated calculations for Floor Area Ratio using Section 5.3.22 of the Zoning Bylaw. Show equations for both existing and proposed.*
Existing floor area dimensions and FAR have been provided on Sheet A-04, and proposed floor area dimensions and FAR calculations have been provided on Sheet A- 07.

Of note: The applicant’s original dimension worksheet listed the ‘existing’ (old building) FAR at .67. We notice that on their updated worksheet they included the unfinished, non-habitable basement area in factoring FAR for the old /previous building, and imagine it

was included to detract from the significant increase in FAR in the current project which clocks in at .99, a third more than the original building.

- *Identify where short term and long term bicycle parking will be located; long term bicycle parking must be inside the structure. 1.5 long-term bicycle parking spaces are required per dwelling unit (6 total), and 0.10 short-term spaces are required per dwelling area (1 total).*

The Applicant has proposed to locate short-term bicycle parking in the front yard setback; however, the details of the bicycle rack fixture have not been provided. A total eight long-term bicycle parking locations are proposed in the basement level of the building (two spaces per unit).

- *A site plan showing the location of screening per Section 6.1.11(D).*

The Applicant has proposed to install a privacy fence around the rear perimeter of the site as shown on the updated site plan. Per Section 6.1.11(D), if a five to six foot high fence is installed, a five foot setback with appropriate plantings would be required adjacent to the side and rear yard parking areas. The setback area has not been identified in the updated site plan.

The absence of this is concerning and should be required as a condition of any approval.

- *On site plan or other diagram, identify location of curbing or perimeter landscaping on usable open space.*

The Applicant has proposed to install a crushed stone buffer along the perimeter of the usable open space in the rear yard, and also proposes to plant shrubs along the perimeter of the open space. Dimensions of the buffer area and landscaping details (shrub species, etc.) have not been provided.

- *Consider modifying wood fencing in the front of the house to make the appearance less imposing from the street.*

The Applicant has indicated they are considering a lower fence than what was originally proposed. Details of the modified fencing such as fencing height or materials have not been provided.

Without details it is difficult to comment fully on this. The fencing used on this developer's previous project in the neighborhood is out of character with the neighborhood that is completely fence free in the front portion of all other properties on the street. Fencing off the front yard gives the feel of closing off neighbors from one another. Our neighborhood does not want to become walled off in this way and we fear this sets a precedent for future development in the neighborhood. As it is, the developer has compared the new build with their previous project at 13-15 Belknap, to show that it's similar. Of note: The prior project was done during the height of the COVID shut down, and likely did not get the oversight it needed in terms of following regulations, so it would be important not to use that project as a metric for this neighborhood.

Any front yard fence, hedge etc. should also consider Traffic Visibility per 5.3.12

B. Visibility for Driveways

“A fence, hedge, wall, sign or other structure or vegetation may be maintained on any lot provided that in the front yard area, no such structure or vegetation shall be over two and one-half feet in height above the adjacent ground within five feet of the front lot line unless it can be shown that the vegetation or structure will not restrict visibility in such a way as to hinder the safe entry of a vehicle from any driveway to the street.”

As the current design would require all cars to be backing out across the sidewalk into the street, with a telephone pole directly on the edge of the driveway, it would be important to consider the safety for cars and pedestrians both relative to the impact of the front “fencing” and the back parking areas, and to potentially require some modification so that folks could maneuver in back in order to drive out forward.

- *Provide clarification of the setback with regard to the window wells per Section 5.3.9(B).* The updated site plan indicates that the front window wells are set back 21.3 feet from the property line.

We assume the front property line is at the property side of the sidewalk, yes? Has ISD verified these measurements? They appear to be inaccurate and again, there appear to be inconsistencies in the applicant’s documents.

The newly presented dimensional worksheet lists the front yard as being 25.3 feet. They list the previous front yard as being 19.5 feet – and yet they actually expanded the foundation forward – so how can it be larger now from what it was previously?

Lastly, we wonder if there is consideration of surface water and storm water drainage. Might the parking areas be made permeable rather than paved?

The other thing that seems not to have been considered is snow removal. In a tightly compressed area there is little space for shoveled and plowed snow to go, often landing it in the street for the town to ‘deal with.’ With fencing in front owners will potentially find it more difficult to keep walkways clear in the winter.

Thank you again for your time.