

January 19, 2022

Community Development Department
City of Cambridge
244 Broadway
Cambridge Massachusetts

Dear Planning Board Members,

Thank you for your thoughtful comments received during our initial presentation to the Planning Board for the proposed Revitalization of Jefferson Park Federal on November 9th, 2021 and the corresponding Initial Report dated on November 23, 2021.

In the intervening time, the CHA and our design team, BWA Architecture, have been working hard to address and incorporate both Planning Board and the City's comments. This has included multiple meetings with the Community Development Department (CDD) staff for their review and input on our design progress since November 9th. We heard clearly that the building facades were too plain, and that increased massing articulation, roofline detail, ground level detail, and variation in material, color and texture were needed. We also heard your concerns about equitable access to open spaces, amenities, and increasing trees and landscaped areas. To help organize our presentation and submission we have arranged this second Affordable Housing Overlay (AHO) submission along these two themes: improved access to open spaces and amenities, and improved façade design and material changes. The attached matrix provides responses to every comment received by the Planning Board and corresponding comments received from CDD, and details the changes made in response to each comment.

The materials contained in this second AHO submission have all been provided to highlight design changes and updates made in direct response to the comments received. Additional drawings and details have been added to build on our original AHO submission, but only building plans with significant changes from the initial AHO submission have been included. All renderings, building elevations and landscape plans have been updated to show the improvements made in response to comments received. For instance, updated first floor plans are included in this submission to show added community spaces and changes to bike parking rooms. Similarly, the fourth-floor plan of Building 4 is included to show the addition of a rooftop terrace and fitness room, but floorplans without significant changes are not included.

Landscape, Open Space, and Amenities

In response to Planning Board comments, significant improvements have been made across the site to amenities, landscape features and plantings to better serve residents of all buildings. In the buildings with semi-private courtyards, we have added benches and play areas for children.

To provide similar access to amenities as the buildings with semi-private courtyards to all buildings, areas with grills and picnic tables have been added to the open spaces of Buildings 4 and 5. While the park-like spaces surrounding these buildings are meant to be shared by the entire site, these grilling and seating areas will be intended for use by residents of that building. Room for these amenities at Building 5 was made possible by the relocation of the generator to the rooftop, as requested by CDD staff. Benches and seating walls have been added throughout the site, in courtyards, near playgrounds, at the main entrances of elevator buildings, and along Rindge Avenue. Benches were also added at the intersection of “main” and “north” streets, and at other locations along buildings where they did not impede on the privacy of a nearby unit or unit entry. Additional short-term bicycle parking was added to each building in coordination with CDD staff.

Increasing resident access to usable open space has been a stated design guideline from the inception of this project. To provide more usable open space for the largest elevator building, Building 4, our design team expanded the pocket park across “east” street next to the cemetery and near the front entrance of Building 4. Adjusting bedroom sizes and apartment layouts also allowed for the addition of a fourth-floor roof terrace on Building 4 that overlooks the park below.

Community and indoor site amenities have also been increased. In addition to the lounge at the first floor where residents can interact or wait for a ride, Building 4 now has its own community room overlooking the courtyard, and a fitness room overlooking the rooftop terrace. A fitness room has been added to Building 5 as well, and the community room that will be shared across the site has been expanded to include computers and printers so it will be a flexible space for meetings, parties, or other resident needs.

The site landscape design has benefited from the addition of several larger caliper specimen trees, as requested by the Planning Board. After re-evaluating planting locations in response to the request to add street trees, street trees were added along the west side of “east” street and the east side of “west” street at Buildings 5 and 6. Landscaped buffers have been added along Rindge Avenue in front of the Head Start classrooms, to provide more greenery along this street, further separate the building from the sidewalk, and improve the entrance to the Head Start and development. The landscaped buffers along all buildings were further detailed by our landscape architects to create a layered façade planting with lower perennials that step up to larger shrubs and provide visual interest along the buildings and sidewalks. Tree species and cultivar selection has been coordinated with city arborists and landscape architects at DPW, as well as with input from the Cambridge Committee on Public Planting. Tree species and distribution maintain the City’s 30-20-10 species distribution goal.

Building Design and Materials

Our design team has done an exceptional job improving the exterior character of these six residential buildings in response to the varied comments from the Planning Board and CDD. Creating a visual hierarchy, with more emphasis given to the facades along “main” street, has been adopted as a design guideline and has been considered with each improvement to building

design, façade, and materials. Greater articulation of massing has been added to each building to add visual interest to the facades. This is particularly important at the building corners, especially along “main” street, where the massing at building corners creates a shared language between different buildings and sets up a rhythm along “main” street, that works to differentiate the importance of this primary thoroughfare from side-streets. The facades and massing of Building 1 have undergone significant changes, as well, with an increase in frequency to the undulation of the ribbon element along Rindge, that is reminiscent of bay windows along a block of row houses and better responds to the two- and three-story homes across the street. Greater articulation of massing was added to the entrances of the three elevator buildings, making common entrances more formal and visible. As changes in massing were developed, so were changes to the roofline to increase visual interest. Building rooflines now vary in height in tandem with changes in massing. Other buildings have adopted different styles of cornice to enhance the roofline and increase visual interest. Along with adjustments for visual interest, parapet height was adjusted to completely screen rooftop mechanical equipment from pedestrian view.

Significant changes have been made to increase the pedestrian experience along the first-floor façade. The CMU facades along the ground level have been detailed to add color, texture and visual interest; each building has a unique pattern. This material is no longer segregated from upper levels, as several buildings now carry this texture to upper floors, making the first-floor facades feel less constrained. Cast stone now plays a major role along the ground level, with the addition of cast stone banding, base-courses and lintels. This is taken further along “Main Street,” where each entrance and window along the ground floor is surrounded by cast stone to give more importance to this street within the development. Also enhancing the “Main” Street façade, decorative sconces at private entrances will add another layer of character to the primary spine of the street. Private entry stoops have been detailed with horizontal wood screening to break up cast-in-place steps, and as a nod to the entries at Jefferson Park State. Lastly, greater detail and increase in landscaped buffers between the sidewalk and building has been added and tree planting plan developed to enhance the pedestrian experience. “Main” Street will receive one species on both sides to enforce the more formal look up and down the street, whereas secondary ways will receive a mixture of species like more typical streets in Cambridge. These developments will help enhance the prominence of “Main” Street and create a more interesting pedestrian experience throughout the development.

Additional material textures and colors have been added to all buildings to create more lively facades. While the level of detail of the facades has increased universally as the designs progress, significant changes can be highlighted at the windows. Differing materials have been added around windows to increase their prominence, and to group sets of windows together in different hierarchies. In tandem with use of cast stone lintels and surrounds along the ground level, upper windows on buildings have been detailed with shadow boxes, or windows have been nested within a contrasting material with differing patterns of trim and surrounding materials. Similar to the enhanced detailing of CMU texture and color patterning, patterning has been added to ribbed metal siding, where the size of ribbing changes from panel to panel creating visual interest in a plane of a single material. Building on the use of cast stone at the ground level of all buildings, large format cast stone blocks have been added as a material to Building 3,

reducing the amount of cementitious panels. Project wide, the use of cementitious panels and EIFS has been reduced.

Moving Forward Under the AHO

We want to thank the Planning Board and the City again for the thoughtful comments received so far. The thoroughness of everyone's review is clear from the comments. We know this is a large project with a lot of material to review and we appreciate the work everyone has put into these reviews. The building designs and resident experience have been significantly improved through this process. Most importantly, through this process we have not only preserved 175 units of housing that were in danger of being lost, but added 103 family-sized units that will create a life-changing opportunity for families on CHA's waitlist. We are pleased to present you with these new designs, and we look forward to discussing this important project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of loops and curves that form the name "Michael J. Johnston".

Michael J. Johnston
Executive Director

cc. Clara Fraden, Joe Bednar, and Margaret Donnelly Moran, CHA