# B'NAI B'RITH HOUSING

May 1, 2024

Ms. Swaathi Joseph Zoning Project Planner Community Development Department City of Cambridge 344 Broadway Cambridge, MA 02139

Dear Ms. Joseph,

B'nai B'rith Housing is pleased to submit a revised proposal for the development of 110 units of 100 percent affordable senior housing at 87-101 Blanchard Road in the Cambridge Highlands neighborhood. Our proposal is consistent with the requirements of the City's Affordable Housing Overlay zoning process.

This revised proposal reflects considerable collaboration between B'nai B'rith Housing and City staff over the past several months since the filing of our original proposal in December of 2023. In revising our proposal, we have taken into account comments received from the Planning Board at our first design review consultation in January, written comments from City staff and informal comments received during multiple meetings with City staff.

A summary of formal comments received from the Board and staff and our response to those comments is attached.

We believe that the dialogue and collaboration between B'nai B'rith Housing and the City in crafting this revised proposal has greatly improved the site design, architectural design and the project's integration with the surrounding neighborhood. We are grateful for the time and effort of City staff in helping us prepare this submission.

Sincere

Susan Gittelman Executive Director

Enclosures

- 1. Response to Comments Matrix
- 2. Volume 1: Forms & Narrative
- 3. Volume 2: Graphics
- 4. Volume 3: Other Requirements

Planning Board Initial Report of AHO Design Consultation (2/13/24)	
Planning Board Comment	B'nai B'rith Housing's Response
Site Design	
<ul> <li>Is it possible to reduce the overall amount of paving on the site?</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>By incorporating the Board's suggestion to restrict circulation through the porte cochere to one way and reducing the width of the drive aisle between the building and the landscape island from 24 feet to 20 feet, we've been able to reduce vehicular paving in the parking lot by 465 square feet. As a result, the landscape island has been widened from 3.5 feet to 7 feet, allowing for the addition of 2 new trees in the island. Our project only includes 30 parking spaces. The adjacent 80 spaces, or 73% of the parking, are off our property and out of our control.</li> </ul>
	<ul> <li>To enhance the pedestrian experience and safety, modest changes have been incorporated which increase the area of pedestrian hardscape. These changes respond to Board and neighborhood concerns that vehicular congestion on Blanchard Road might diminish the pedestrian experience on the new sidewalk. In response to this concern, we have widened the new Blanchard Road sidewalk from 6.6 feet to 8.9 feet. By providing a more generous sidewalk with ample plantings, eliminating the block-long curb cut and one of two existing driveways, we believe the experience of pedestrians, bikers and our residents between the existing Normandy Avenue neighborhood and the Belmont town line will be significantly enhanced. A pedestrian walk has also been added connecting the Blanchard Road sidewalk to the parking lot. This walk connects to a painted pedestrian path connecting to the building's main entrance. Pedestrians will have a designated path to traverse from Blanchard to the main entrance. This designated route also ensures bicyclists have access to the bicycle storage room that does not require traversing the amenity deck. Signage will be included to warn drivers of potential bicyclists in the parking lot.</li> </ul>
<ul> <li>Is it possible to reduce the area underneath the building footprint designated for parking at-grade?</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>We appreciate the Board's discussion about the number of parking spaces on site and took the opportunity to further study the issue. Based on our experience developing and operating senior housing communities in other urban locations, we agree with the one Board member who stated that the project is "not overparked". Although the project site is in an urban location located on MBTA bus routes, it's likely some residents will own vehicles and prefer to use them to access off-site services and amenities. During our two community meetings, neighbors</li> </ul>

	expressed concern about residents parking on Normandy Avenue. We believe the proposed 30 spaces are necessary and adequate to serve the needs of staff and residents, as well as addressing neighborhood concerns about on-street parking. Resident parking will be managed consistent with our practice at other properties. Resident parking permits will be available on a first-come first-served basis. Parking spaces are not assigned. Property management will monitor the parking utilization to ensure only permitted vehicles are using the parking spaces.
	• The parking underneath the building is well screened and is not visible from the street. We have included additional perspectives in our design package to help convey this.
<ul> <li>Explore opportunities to add trees – both in the proposed parking area, as well as along Blanchard Road to help create a double allee' of trees along the sidewalk.</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>In response to this comment and discussion with CDD staff, we have added nine new trees to the plan, resulting in an overall improvement to the project and increased mitigation of heat island effects. Four trees have been added adjacent to the main building entrance, two trees have been added to the landscape island proximate to the main entrance, two trees have been added to the landscape buffer along Normandy Avenue and one tree has been added on the north side of the property, between the Blue Bike station and the amenity deck.</li> <li>Although we do not own or control the parking associated with the two adjacent apartment buildings, we studied the feasibility of adding trees to the landscape island off our property. However, to comply with City standard dimensions for parking spaces and drive aisles, it is not possible to widen the island. Planting trees in a 4' wide island without the benefit of a structural soil panel and having a high exposure to summer heat and salt in the winter greatly reduces their chance of survival. Based on the experience of our landscape design team, we believe trees planted in this location are unlikely to survive long term.</li> <li>The viability of trees planted closer to the road will be impacted by a sewer main running parallel to the street. However, as suggested by staff, we have shifted the trees along the face of the building on Blanchard Road closer to the roid word. building more shade to the sidewalk. We are open to collaborating further with the City to explore other options to enhance the pedestrian experience, such as decorative bollards.</li> <li>We have also studied alternatives to the three dogwood trees planted outside the Blanchard Road entrance. The three Pagoda Dogwoods proposed in the planter outside the building entrance on Blanchard Road are likely to grow to 25' tall. They were chosen for their tiered horizontally branching growing habit and spring flowers. These trees within the planter and the integrated bench form a buffer or 'room' for this</li></ul>

	Blanchard Road. Because the trees are in a planter, they won't have the same access to soil and water as the rest of the trees along Blanchard. We have planted understory trees here for this reason. A canopy tree in a small soil volume will have a bonsai effect, never growing to its full size and, if the same species, will look odd next to the rest of the trees on Blanchard. Maples are particularly inappropriate for planters as they are very shallow rooting. Shorter trees in this location also allow more direct sunlight on the solar chargers for the Blue Bike station.
<ul> <li>Consider expanding open space and recreation areas, including expanding the outdoor deck area or creating additional green spaces on the site, such as an area for a community garden.</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>The ground floor outdoor amenity deck has been increased from 725 SF to 1,375 SF, providing flexibility to create outdoor "rooms" as needed to accommodate multiple groups or activities simultaneously. The fifth-floor lounge has been enlarged from 414 SF to 669 SF, also creating more flexibility for programming.</li> <li>Raised planter boxes are a popular amenity at some of our other senior properties. Although our property is highly constrained and opportunities to add outdoor amenities are limited, we will explore the feasibility of incorporating planter boxes.</li> </ul>
<ul> <li>Provide more information on the proposed amenity spaces and the planned programming to link outdoor areas with indoor spaces.</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Amenity space programming will be developed in coordination with the resident services and property management teams. Ground floor spaces are designed to be flexible and accommodate a variety of program types and activities. Wellness programs focused on healthy living are a major focus, including balance, tai chi, chair and floor yoga classes, as well as nutrition and health screening programs and healthful living workshops. Health and wellness programs such as yoga and balance classes could also be conducted in a dance studio or fitness-outfitted spaces. Beyond wellness and healthful living programming, resident service coordinators plan and implement social, cultural and educational programming both within the building and in outdoor deck and patio spaces, as well as offering off-site outings. Social programming is essential to help avoid isolation and loneliness that elders often experience. These activities may include in-person or video simulcast concerts, movie nights, guest speakers, holiday gatherings, intergenerational activities, birthday parties, cooking classes that happen in a demonstration-style kitchen, great room/living room, or other amenity space that can accommodate multiple uses and gatherings. Activities such as musical entertainment, box garden/gardening classes, holiday gatherings, coffee hours and art therapy can all take advantage of the indoor-outdoor connections at the ground floor amenity deck and at the fifth-floor lounge and connected roof deck. Health and wellness programs such as yoga and balance classes could also be conducted in these indoor-outdoor spaces.</li> </ul>

Iding Design	
<ul> <li>Consider opportunities to further increase the articulation of the façade, through techniques such as adding balconies to units.</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Cost, building design and operational concerns do not allow for unit balconies. None of our senior affordable housing communities have balconies. The cost of adding balconies is prohibitive and can't be supported in the heavily subsidized development budget. In addition, the proposed building design includes bay windows and four-story massing. In response to comments from Board members and staff, the building's updated design has a significant amount of depth and articulation, some of which would be negated by the addition of balconies. Exterior doors to balconies also make it more difficult to comply with PHIUS energy modeling requirements by increasing thermal bridging that has to be mitigated. Additional doors introduce weak points in the building envelope that make achieving the air tightness tests much harder to achieve, as well as increasing the risk of rainwater penetration due to improperly secured doors. Operationally, balconies are difficult spaces to manage with a population that is aging in place. Residents who've accumulated a lifetime of personal belongings often use balconies as storage space, which can become cluttered and unsightly.</li> </ul>
<ul> <li>Consider reducing the number of materials planned for the façade and relying more on neighborhood context for material options.</li> </ul>	• The exterior material palette has been limited to brick, metal panel, wood/composite wood accent planks, cement clapboard and cement panel.
<ul> <li>Explore opportunities to better connect the ground-story unit on the northeastern corner of the building to the rest of the residential areas of the building.</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>The ground-story residential unit on the northeast corner of the building has been relocated closer to the building lobby and community spaces. The lobby and community spaces are a central gathering location for residents. Adjacency to these uses will ensure the unit does not feel isolated from the rest of the building.</li> <li>At the suggestion of CDD staff, we explored the possibility of relocating the trash room in order to cluster all ground floor units together. However, we believe the proposed location is more centrally located, providing all residents convenient access to the trash chute.</li> </ul>
<ul> <li>To address some of the site design comments above, consider reducing the building's footprint, balanced by increases in height in certain parts of the building, to preserve the overall number of planned units.</li> </ul>	• The building footprint has been reduced by 246 SF, enabling a relocation of outdoor covered bike racks and a related expansion of the amenity deck. The change also results in further articulation of the building.

(1/17/24)		
Zoning & Development Staff Report		
Further Considerations	B'nai B'rith Housing's Response	
<ul> <li>Detail of proposed mechanical screen to ensure screening meets minimum 75% opacity requirement as set forth in Section 11.207.7.5.c.</li> </ul>	The mechanical screen is proposed to be opaque corrugated metal panels.	
Urban Design Staff Report		
Recommendations for Building Design	B'nai B'rith Housing's Response	
Massing		
• The articulation of the two legs of the building is similar despite different contextual conditions. Adjusting the massing and materials to reinforce the reading of a primary bar that addresses Blanchard Road, and a secondary rear bar along the stream may better align the building to its context ( <i>Building Design-1.5</i> ).	• The overall massing strategy that is reinforced by the materiality is a six-story L-shaped building with each wing stepping down to 4-story massing to transition to the immediate context. We feel the building's proportions should be horizontal to more naturally transition the six-story scale. To that end, the materials have been further refined to reinforce our massing strategy.	
<ul> <li>Emphasizing the northwest corner is sensible given its visual prominence and correlation with the building entry. Its articulation may benefit from studying alternative strategies such as larger windows or the inclusion of balconies (Building Design-1.12, 2.3, 2.10).</li> </ul>	• The window brick detailing has been further articulated to accentuate and respond to the visual prominence.	
<ul> <li>The port cochere's design language seems incongruous with the rest of the building. Employing a similar language as the canopy above the Blanchard Road entrance and community spaces could help visually unify the building (Building Design-2.11).</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>The porte cochere is designed as a playful sculptural element as a wayfinding device and focal point interior to the site.</li> </ul>	
Façade		
<ul> <li>The application of brick should ideally be weighted towards the most publicly visible elevation along Blanchard Road. The brick facades would be further enriched by including techniques such as soldier courses, lintels, and pilasters (Building Design-2.7).</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>The brick facades have been further detailed and articulated with windowsills and soldier course headers.</li> <li>In response to CDD comments, we have also changed the dimensions of the brick massing on the northwest corner of the building, giving more preference to the Blanchard Road elevation. We've also extended the horizontal material break between the fourth and fifth floors on the north façade of the eastern wing.</li> </ul>	
<ul> <li>The bays add depth and a residential scale to the façade. However, the proposed use of clapboard cladding seems incongruous with similar instances found throughout the neighborhood (Building Design-2.2, 2.4, 2.6).</li> </ul>	• The bay window cladding has been revised to metal panel more appropriate to their form. Additional detailing to the bays along with a roof cap the bays and add overall more depth to the façade.	

• The combination of balance of brick and panelized cladding on the lower portion along Blanchard Road may benefit from further study and refinement.	• In response to this comment, we studied and refined these elements. The proportions of the larger window groupings in the brick have been revised to align better and make the tripartite façade organization more apparent.
• The ground floor at the northwest corner is appropriately visually distinct. The design would benefit from a similarly clear definition of the building's base along the rest of the west elevation (Building Design-2.13).	• The façade composition has been refined to allow the tripartite façade organization to be more apparent.
Ground Floor	
<ul> <li>The inclusion of amenity spaces along the Blair Pond Stream creates a strong relationship between the building and the site by highlighting an existing natural amenity. Exchanging the location of the Bicycle Storage Room with the Common Room/Community Deck could avoid potential conflicts caused by cyclists having to cross the community deck (Site Design-3.7).</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>We have relocated the covered outdoor bicycle racks previously shown on the north side of the building. The amenity deck will be gated, with secure access for residents only. Bicyclists will be directed to circulate from Blanchard Road through the parking lot to reach the bicycle storage room. Exchanging the bicycle storage room with the adjacent common room is not feasible operationally. The common rooms and building lobby are designed as a contiguous collection of community spaces for residents to gather and socialize.</li> </ul>
• The Bicycle Storage Room may want to include spaces for tricycles and larger bicycles given the intended resident demographic.	• The bicycle storage room, combined with the Blue Bike station and outdoor covered spaces are designed to comply with the mandated number of bicycle parking spaces under the AHO. There is no opportunity to increase the size of the bicycle storage room to further accommodate tandem bicycles of tricycles.
<ul> <li>The single 1-Bedroom Unit in the rear portion could benefit from a buffer, such as vegetation or a low wall, to block the headlights of cars parking in the adjacent spaces at night.</li> </ul>	We will continue to explore options to buffer this unit from light intrusion.
• The depth and design of the proposed landscaping along Blanchard Road will greatly enhance the pedestrian experience. An additional strategy might be including direct front entries into each of the first-floor residential units facing it to further reinforce the residential scale and activate Blanchard Road (Site Design-3.3, Building Design-2.14).	• Direct entrances to individual units from the street are not feasible because it would compromise the security of the entire building and all residents. However, in response to this and other comments from staff, we have refined the façade along the first-floor residential units to bring more visual interest and reinforce the residential scale along Blanchard Road.
Recommendations for Building Design	B'nai B'rith Housing's Response
Parking Lot	
<ul> <li>Widening the area between the interior parking bays would accommodate additional trees that will provide shade and reduce the heat island effect (Site Design-2.9, 4.5).</li> </ul>	• By incorporating a suggestion from the Board and staff to restrict circulation through the porte cochere to one-way and reducing the width of the drive aisle between the building and the landscape island from 24 feet to 20 feet, we've been able to reduce vehicular paving in the parking lot by 465 square feet. As a result, the landscape island has been widened from 3.5 feet to 7 feet, allowing for the addition of two new trees in the island. These changes reduce the

<ul> <li>Additional vegetation between the rear volume of the building and the parking lot would provide a visual buffer for adjacent uses (Site Design-2.13).</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>reduce heat island effect.</li> <li>Four additional trees have been included adjacent to the main entrance, providing a visual buffer for adjacent uses. We have also added two benches near the entrance and under the</li> </ul>
provide a visual buller for adjacent uses (site Design-2.13).	shade of the four new trees, providing another outdoor amenity for residents. In our experience, building lobbies and entrances are a popular spot where many senior residents enjoy congregating and experiencing the activity that occurs in these locations.
• The curb cut as shown does not conform to City standards.	<ul> <li>The existing 22' wide cut curb will be maintained and the driveway apron will be designed to City standards.</li> </ul>
Blair Pond	
<ul> <li>The proposed pathway along the Blair Pond Stream creates a wonderful opportunity for residents and the public to experience this currently hidden natural amenity. Any opportunity to collaborate with the adjacent site owners on future extensions that connect to Blair Pond are encouraged (Site Design-2.2, 2.3).</li> </ul>	• We are not able to extend a path to Blair Pond across property we do not own. In addition to not having control over this land, there is no to room add a path in this location. The proposed edge of pavement aligns with the existing edge of pavement, which is essentially at the top of the stream bank. There is existing access to Blair Pond from Normandy Avenue. Residents can walk to this vista point using an existing pedestrian walk connecting the parking lot to Normandy Avenue. The amenity deck and path along the north side of the building are for residents only. There is no public access from Blanchard Road.
Blanchard Road	
<ul> <li>The nearby MBTA bus stop may benefit from being relocated adjacent to the project. It would be ideal if the landscape plan could anticipate this potential future scenario.</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>We are willing to collaborate with the City and the MBTA to study the feasibility of relocating the bus stop.</li> </ul>
<ul> <li>The proposed trees in the front yard setback could be located closer to Blanchard Road to further shade the sidewalk as there are no street trees along this portion of the street.</li> </ul>	• Based on this comment, we have shifted the trees along the face of the building on Blanchard closer to the sidewalk, bringing more shade to the sidewalk.
<ul> <li>Given the target population, exploring the financial impact of upgrading the proposed Blue Bike station to one that supports charging electric bikes may be worthwhile to understand if it can be accomplished.</li> </ul>	• We will explore the feasibility of installing a Blue Bike station with e-bike charging.
Public Art	
<ul> <li>The guidelines suggest incorporating public art into proposed projects. The pathway and</li> </ul>	Art therapy is frequently offered among the social and cultural programming we provide as part
spaces along the Blair Pond Stream could be an ideal location for doing so (Site Design-7.1).	of our service-enriched delivery model. Incorporating public art into the community could be a topic that allows our residents to participate in this exploration. In addition, we have experience collaborating with other non-profits and institutions to bring art into our communities.
Recommendations for Sustainable Design	B'nai B'rith Housing's Response

<ul> <li>Incorporating sun shading devices, canopies, porches, or brise-soleils on shade strongly sunlit facades can help lower thermal gain during warmer seasons (Sustainable Design, 1.6).</li> </ul>	• We have created a brow above the amenity level to shield the storefront glass, which tends to be one of the lower performers from an envelope standpoint. The upper windows are triple paned glass and we don't see the added benefit of sun shading as no façade is in direct sunlight for the entire day. Deciduous trees to be planted along Blanchard Road, outside the main building entrance and in the parking lot will contribute summer shading to the west, south and east elevations while also allowing winter sun to reach the building.
• Employing renewable and low-carbon energy features such as solar photovoltaic systems, solar heating systems, or geothermal heating and cooling systems where feasible can help sustainably lower energy costs ( <i>Sustainable Design, 1.10</i> ).	The building program includes a rooftop PV array.
<ul> <li>Given the increasing number of electric vehicles, incorporating car chargers for tenants would be beneficial. The nine covered spaces may be the most logical place to install them (Sustainable Design, 1.12).</li> </ul>	The building program includes EV charging.
• Integrating "cool roof" or "green roof" systems where possible can contribute to strategies for stormwater management and green infrastructure ( <i>Sustainable Design, 1.14</i> ).	• The roofing system will be designed consistent with Passive House requirements as detailed in the Green Building Requirements.
• Including frequent outlets in the bike room will allow for residents to change their E-Bikes.	We will explore the feasibility of incorporating outlets in the bike room to enable e-bike charging

#### **Ground Floor Plan**

Previous Design (December 8, 2023)



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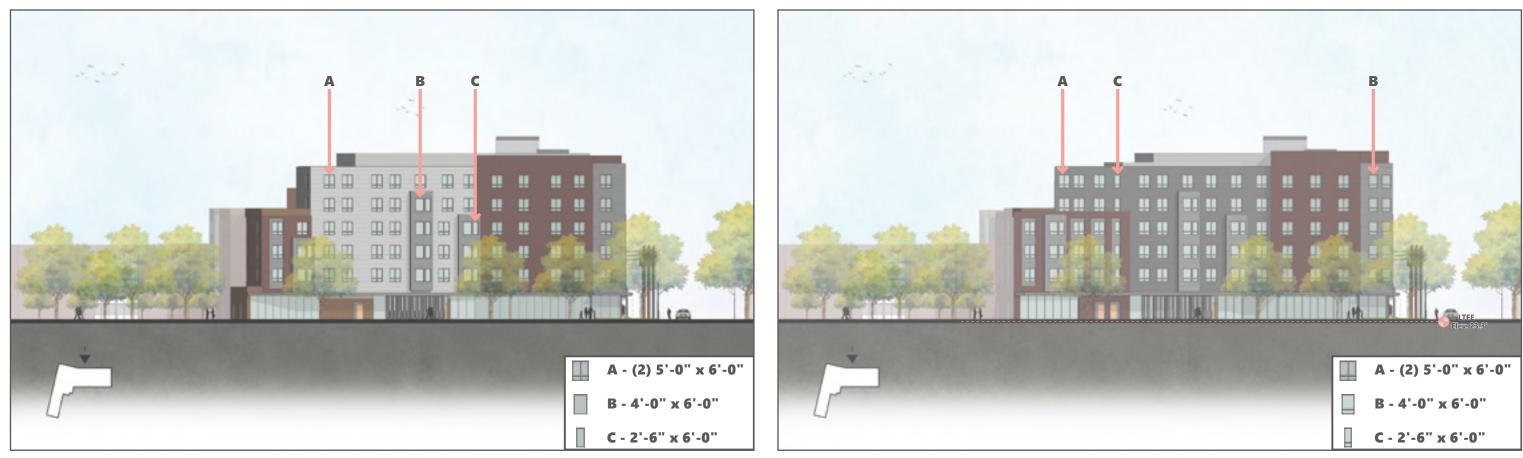






## **North Elevation**

Previous Design (December 8, 2023)



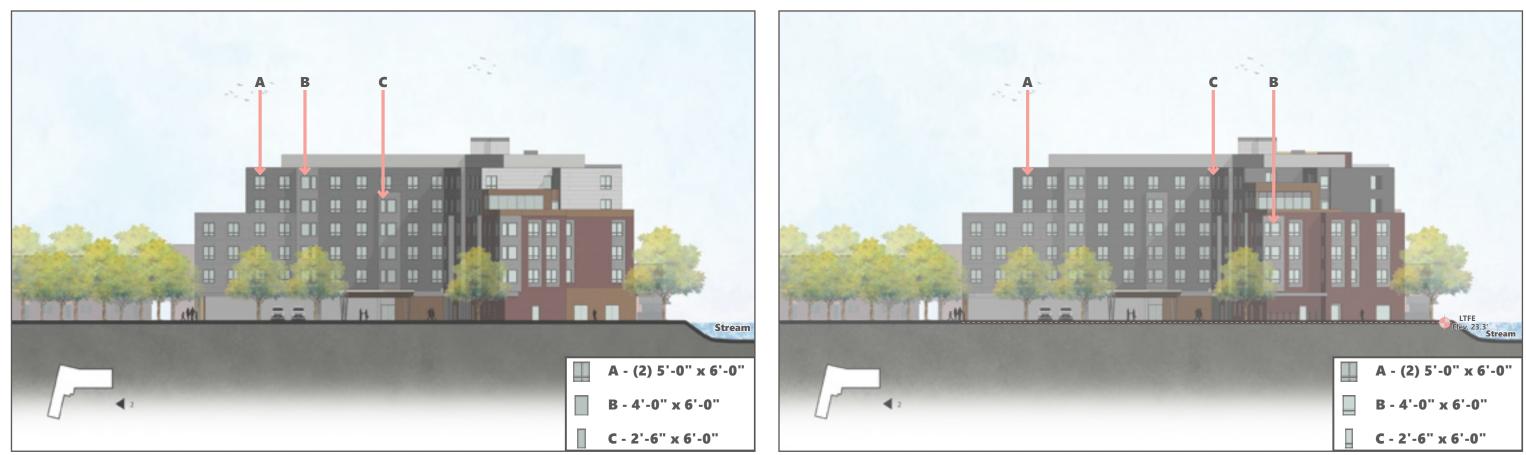
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## **East Elevation**



Previous Design (December 8, 2023)

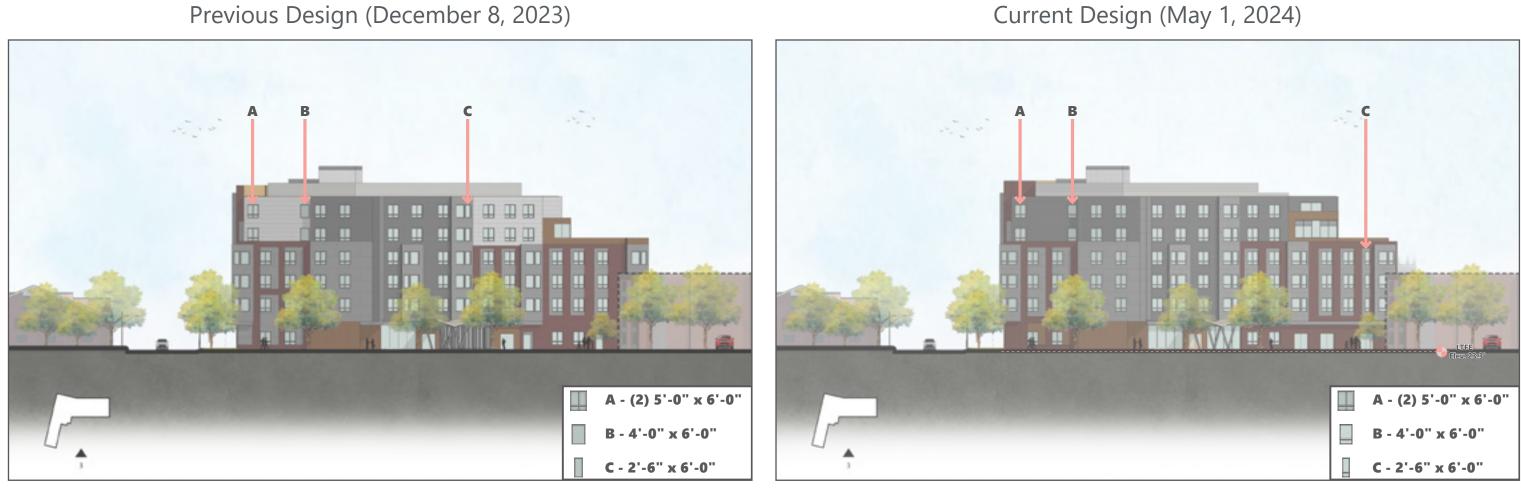








## **South Elevation**

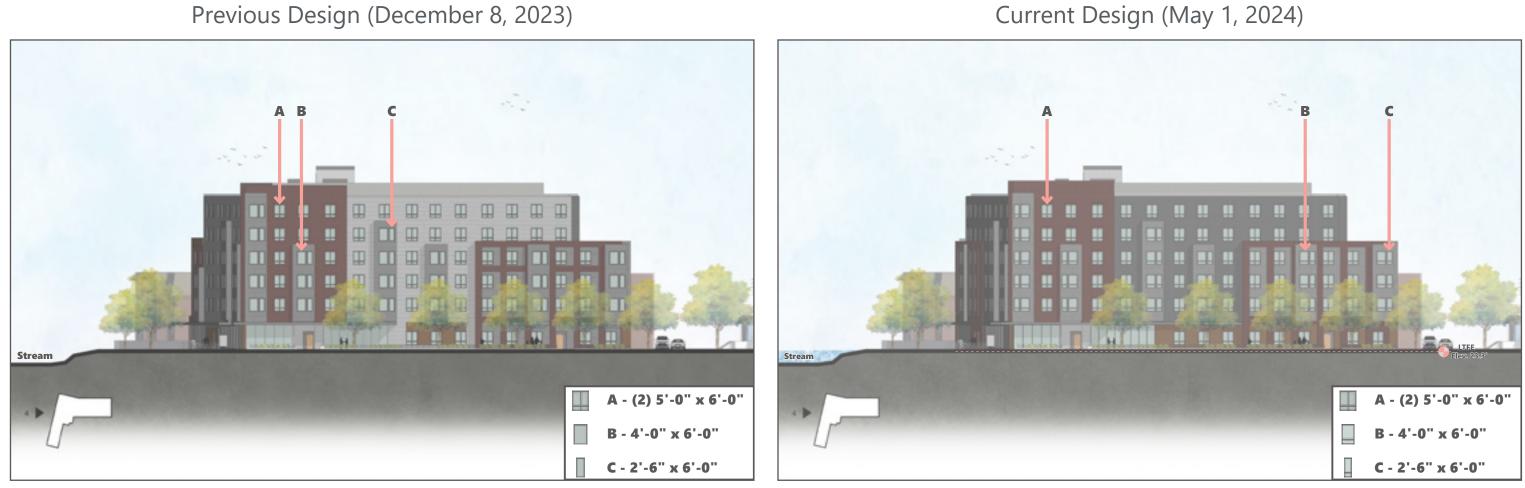








### **West Elevation**









#### **View from Blanchard Road**

Previous Design (December 8, 2023)









#### **View from Hamilton Road**

Previous Design (December 8, 2023)











## **View of Roof Deck and Solarium**

Previous Design (December 8, 2023)









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#### Planning Board Submission 12/08/23



#### Planning Board Submission Revised 05/01/24



Summary of Changes:

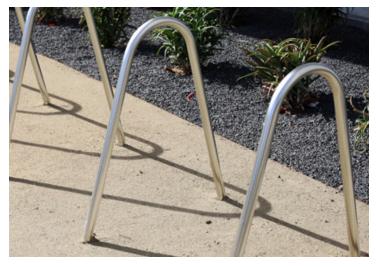
- 1. Increased number of new trees
- 2. Enlarged deck
- 3. Relocated bike racks
- 4. Widened sidewalk
- 5. Enlarged parking island, increased number of trees
- 6. New pedestrian path from Blanchard to parking lot
- 7. New painted pedetrian path from south end of building to main entrance
- 8. Increased planted areas and added trees at entrance, benches added to flank path
- 9. Reduced walkway paving, added planting
- 10. Curb moved for ease of access to trash room.

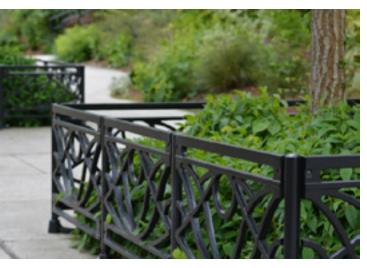












Planter Fence



Wooden Backed Bench with Arms

Bike Rack



Fence & Gate



Permeable Pavers



Precast Concrete Pavers



Wood Decking





Movable Tables and Chairs



Outdoor Grill





