

17 Story Street

17 Story Street, Cambridge, MA

Cambridge Historical Commission

Historic Review Application for Certificate of Appropriateness
Supplementary Materials

Prepared by

Owner : 17 Story Street, LLC.

Architect : CambridgeSeven / Atelier Liu Yuyang Architects

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Project Narratives

17 Story Street: Harriett Jacobs House Restoration, Hotel & Residences

The Context

The historic building at 17 Story Street, referred to now as the Harriet Jacobs house, is a rare surviving example of a Regency Style residence in Cambridge. Originally built in 1846, it served the Harvard community as a boarding house for faculty and students until it was converted to office use in 1957. Harriet Jacobs, notable as the author of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), lived in and managed the boarding house from 1872-75.

While the Harriet Jacobs House has been altered several times over the years including the enlarged Mansard roof in 1870 and embellished with bay windows in about 1890, it still retains its architectural significance as a fine example of the Regency Style as well as its place in Cambridge's history. Presently the Jacobs house sits on its original granite foundation at a substantial distance from Mt. Auburn Street which was common in the era it was constructed. The proposed Hotel + Residence project will include relocating the house prominently on Mt. Auburn Street as well as performing careful alterations that will respect noteworthy features of the structure including exterior details, fenestration, and finishes.


The Project

Understanding that over the years buildings in and around Harvard Square have been typically developed closer to the street edge, this project proposes relocating the Harriet Jacobs House from the back of the site to sit prominently at the front corner of Mt. Auburn and Story Streets. This re-positioning of the house finally elevates its prominence in Harvard Square and serves not only as the focal element of the development but also recognition of Harriet Jacobs' legacy.

This shift of the historic house to the front of the site allows the new eight story Hotel + Residence building to occupy the back of the site and in a sense serve as a backdrop to the house. The new building will have a program including approximately 67 hotel keys as well as approximately 50 residential units. The Harriet Jacobs House will serve as the Hotel Lobby and will connect to a small café. The residences will be accessed via a separate entrance.

Harriet A. Jacobs

ABOLITIONIST, AUTHOR, AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS ADVOCATE
c. 1813 – 1897



In 1835, Jacobs escaped and spent the next seven years hiding in a crawl space above her grandmother's store-room. There she kept watch over her children, who had been purchased by their father and sent to live in the house. Reading and writing to pass the time, she gained the literary experience that enabled her to write her book years later.

In 1842, Jacobs fled to New York, where she worked as a nursemaid, arranged for her children's freedom, and met Quaker reformer Amy Post, who became her confidante and urged her to make her story public.

Jacobs was freed in 1852, and for the next five years wrote her autobiography, *Lydia Maria Child*, an accomplished writer with strong anti-slavery convictions, became Jacobs's editor. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself*, published in 1861 under the pseudonym Linda Brent, is now ranked with Frederick Douglass's *Narrative* and William Wells Brown's *Clotel; Or, The President's Daughter* as a major contribution to the genre of slave narratives.

Jacobs became famous, although many thought her story was too fantastic to be true. She used her prominence to advantage, doing relief work for black soldiers and helping create schools for blacks after the Civil War. Jacobs had lived in Massachusetts for brief periods while fleeing from her master. After the war she rented a house on Trowbridge Street near Massachusetts Avenue, which she ran as a boardinghouse in 1870-1872 for the student sons of her white benefactors. In 1873 she moved to the corner of Story and Mount Auburn streets, where she lived for three years. Jacobs lived out her life in Washington, D.C., but was buried with her brother in Mount Auburn Cemetery.

Related Cambridge African American Trail Markers
William Wells Brown, 29 Webster Avenue
J. Milton Clarke and Lewis Clarke, 2 Florence Place

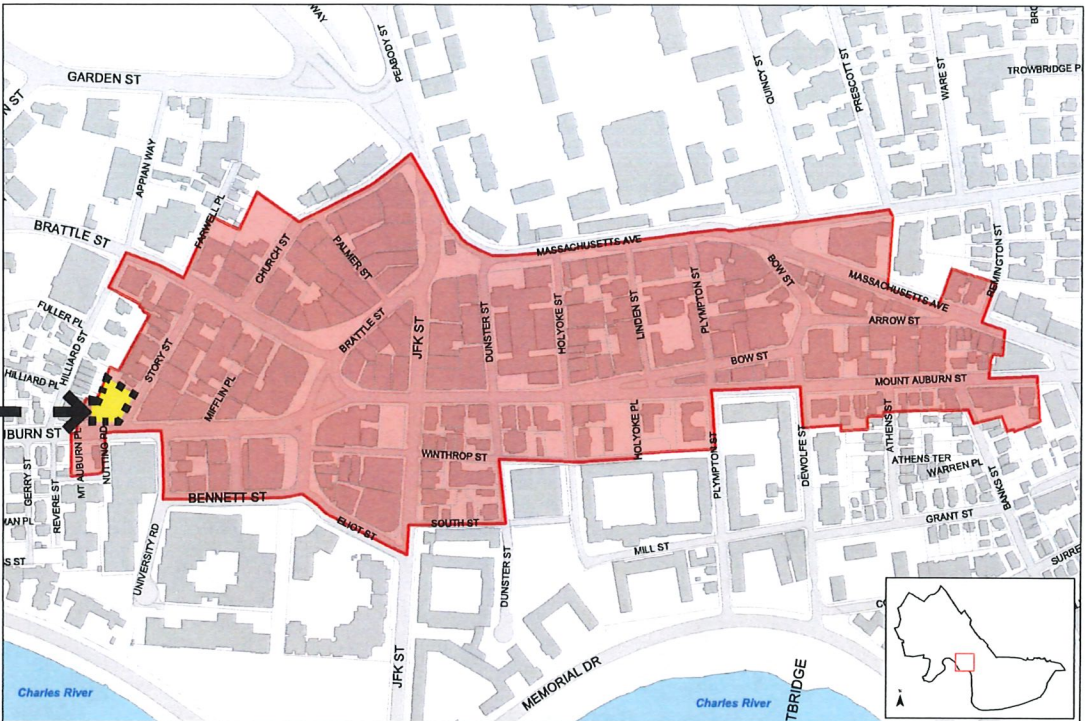
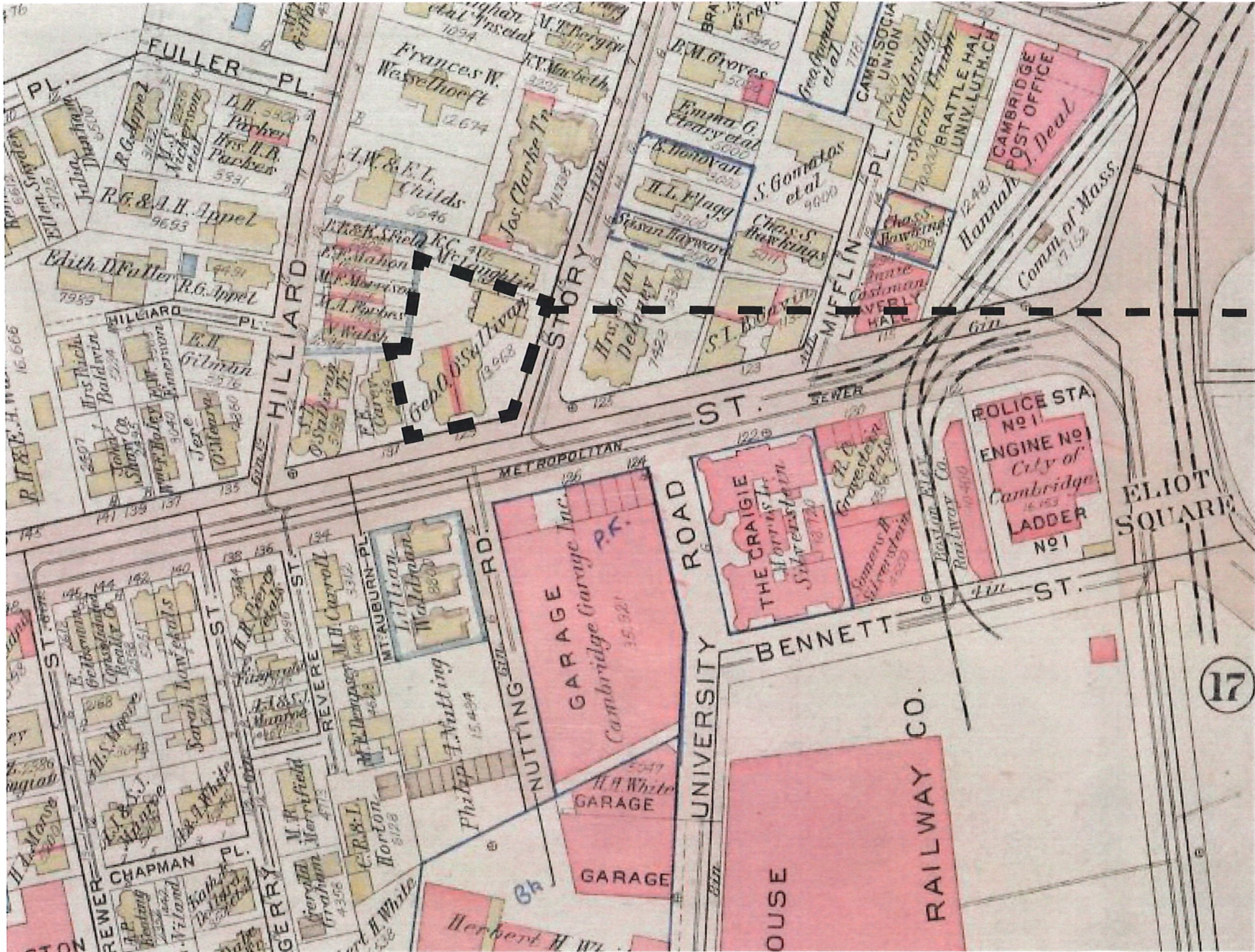
Cambridge African American History Project • 1993

Cambridge Discovery Inc.
Cambridge Historical Commission

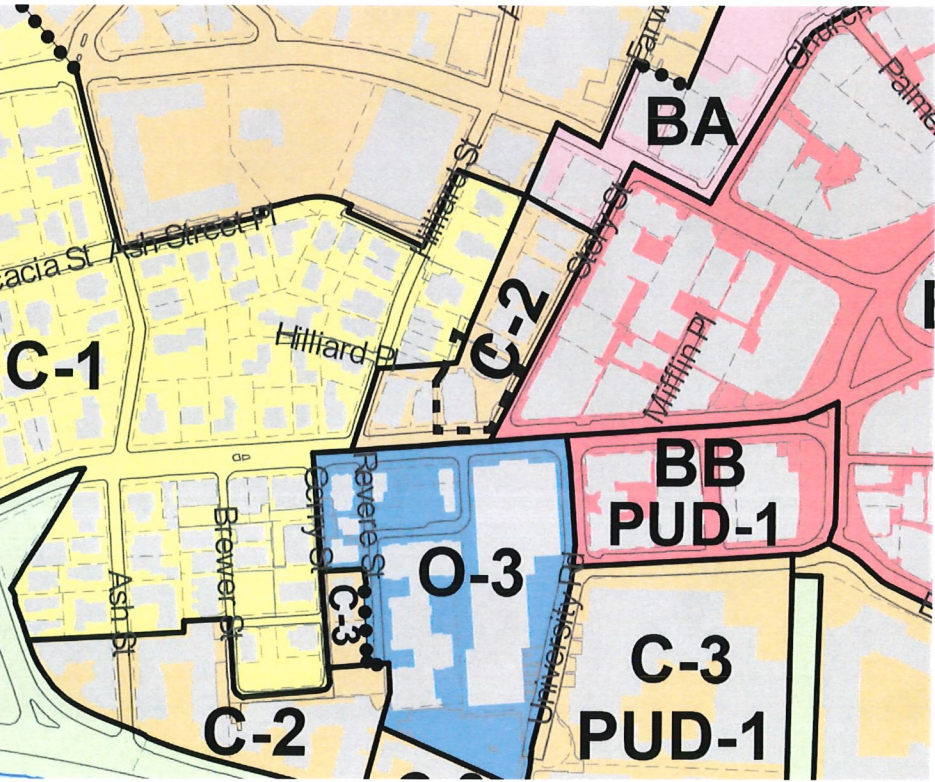


Site Plan

Location & Historic Map



Harvard Square
Neighborhood Conservation District
Cambridge, Mass.



Project Site : 129 Mt. Auburn St., 127 Mt. Auburn/ 17 Story St.

- Harvard Square Neighborhood Conservation District
- Zoning District: Residence C-2 / C-1

This map displays a residential area with various streets and building footprints. A scale bar at the top indicates distances from 0 to 225 feet, and a north arrow is positioned to the right. The highlighted yellow building is located at the intersection of Hilliard St and Story St. The map shows a grid-like street pattern with several streets running diagonally and others running horizontally or vertically. Lot numbers are scattered throughout the map, and a building is highlighted in yellow.

Neighborhood Context

Mt Auburn Street



MT AUBURN ST - NORTH



MT AUBURN ST - SOUTH

Neighborhood Context

Story Street



STORY ST - NORTH WEST



STORY ST - NORTH EAST

Neighborhood Context

Mt Auburn Street

131 Mt Auburn St.

Project Site
129 Mt Auburn St.



From Mt Auburn St. West



125 Mt Auburn St.

Project Site
129 Mt Auburn St.

From Mt Auburn St. East

125 Mt Auburn St.

Project Site
129 Mt Auburn St.
17 Story St.



From Story St. North

15 Story St.

13B Story St.

Project Site
17 Story St.



15 Story St.

From Story St.

MT AUBURN ST

Neighborhood Context

Comparable Sized Buildings



51 Brattle St. 71ft



975 Memorial Dr. 87 - 105ft



60 Brattle St. 61ft



984 Memorial Dr. 70ft



114 Mt Auburn St. 81ft

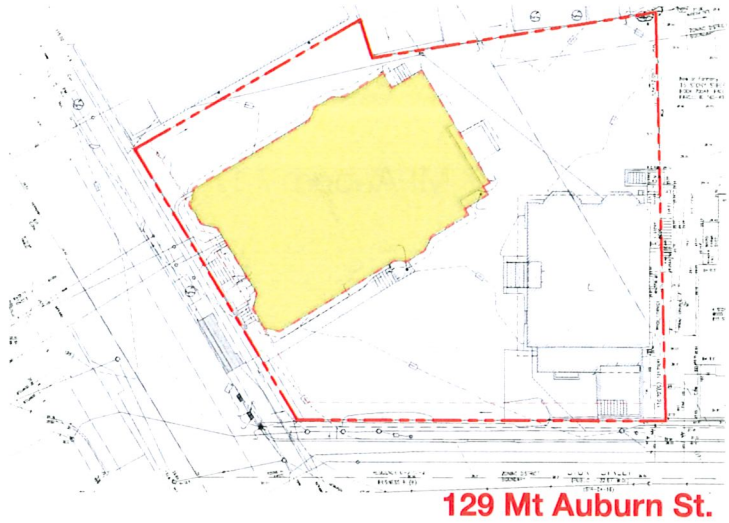


124 Mt Auburn St. 82ft

Existing Building

129 Mt Auburn St.

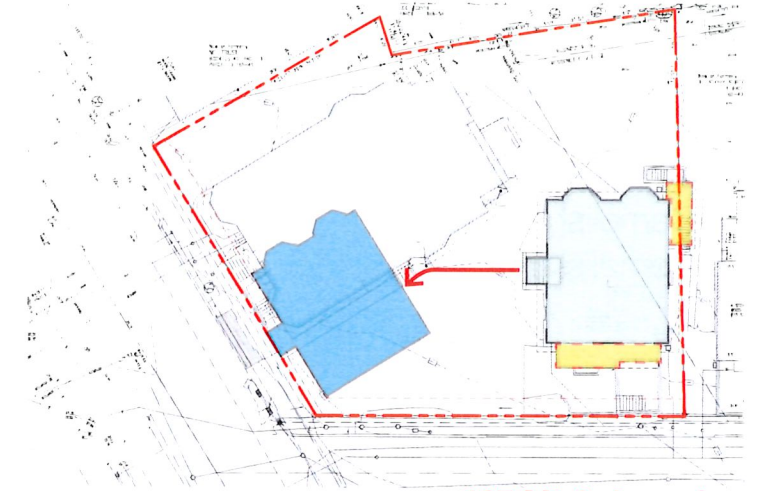
- Demolish building
- Demolish steps
- Demolish rear ell



Existing Building

127 Mt Auburn / 17 Story St.

- Relocate 127 Mt Auburn / 17 Story St. close to Mt Auburn St.



127 Mt Auburn /
17 Story St.



South Elevation - circa 1950

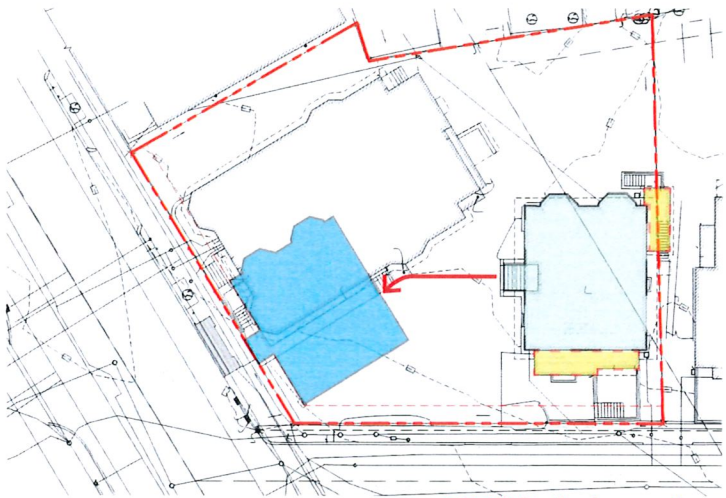


South Elevation - current 2025

Existing Building

127 Mt Auburn / 17 Story St.- Front, Side

- Relocate 127 Mt Auburn / 17 Story St close to Mt Auburn St and lower 1'-0"
- Replace clapboards and trim as needed
- Replace windows with 2-over-2 and 6-over-6 double hung
- Restore missing fluted columns on front entrance
- Restore and repair wrought iron balcony
- Restore and repair granite blocks stair and foundation
- Demolish north and east ell



127 Mt Auburn /
17 Story St.



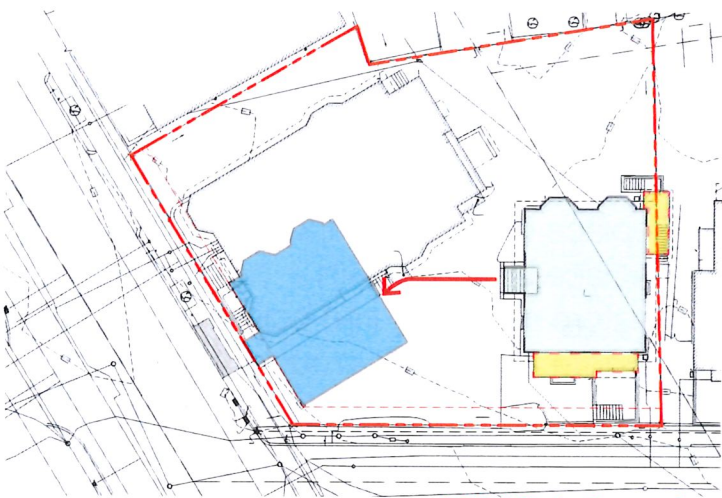
South Elevation

- Replace windows with 2-over-2 double hung
- Replace clapboards and trim as needed
- Replace windows with 6-over-6 double hung
- Repair and restore wrought iron balcony
- Remove ell
- Restore fluted columns



Existing Building

127 Mt Auburn / 17 Story St. - Rear & Sides



127 Mt Auburn /
17 Story St.



Replace windows with 2-over-2 double hung

Replace windows with 6-over-6 double hung

Remove portion of wall for new building connection

Replace clapboards and trim as needed

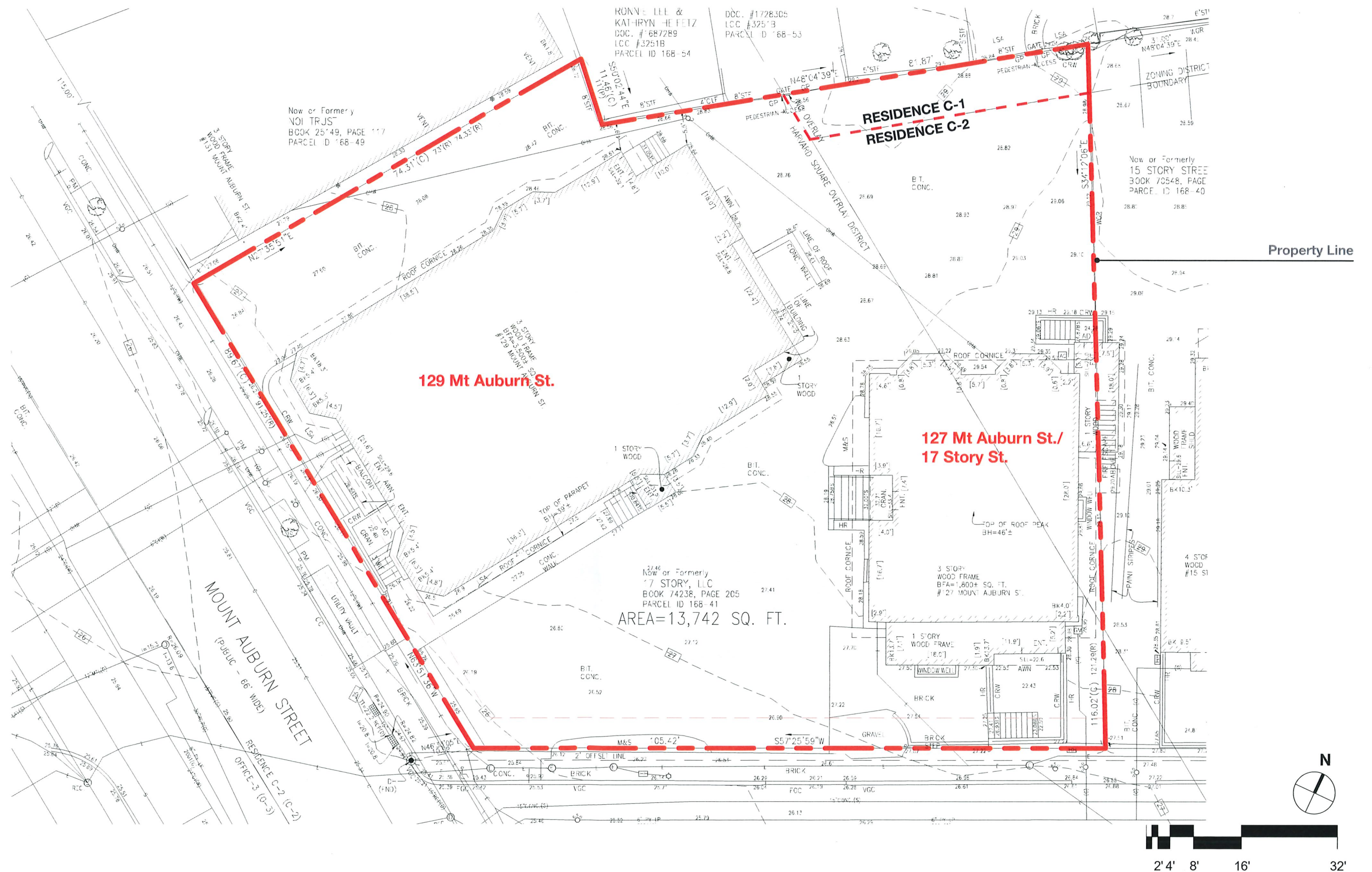
Remove ell with stair



South Elevation - circa 1950

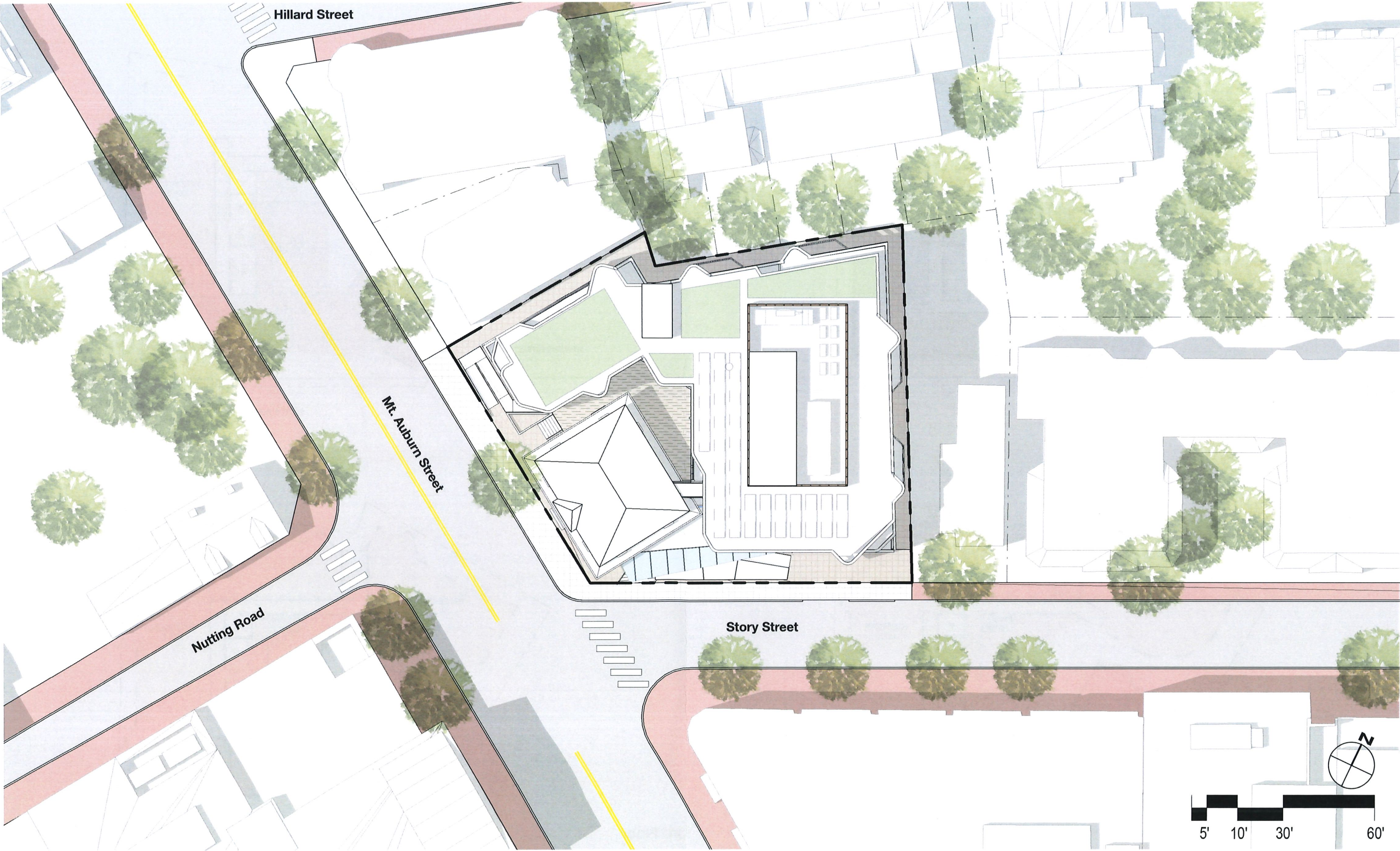
South Elevation - current 2025

Existing



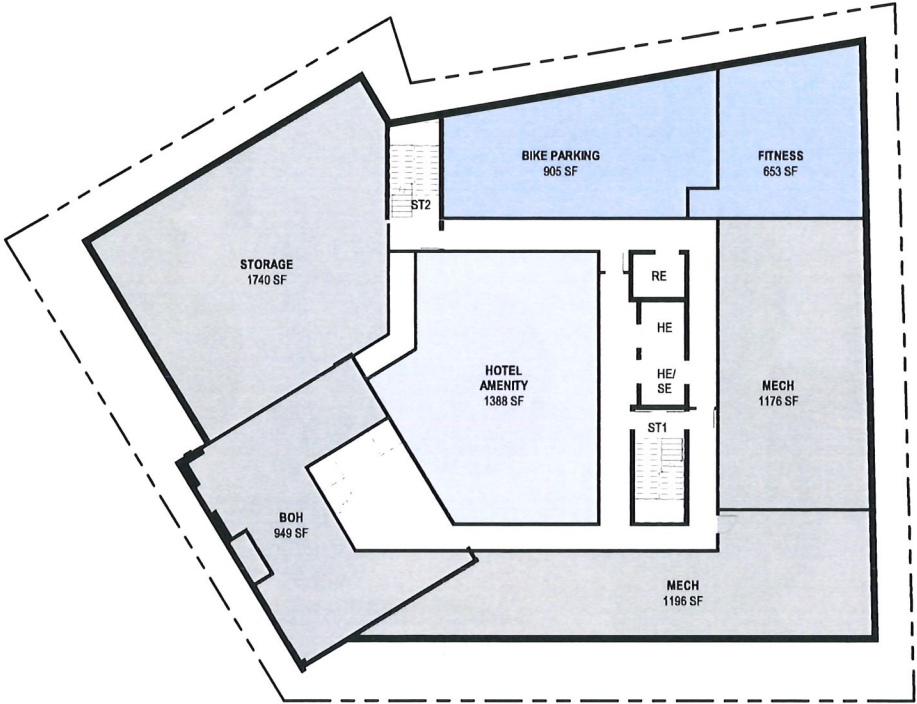
Site Plan

Proposed



Project Floor Plans

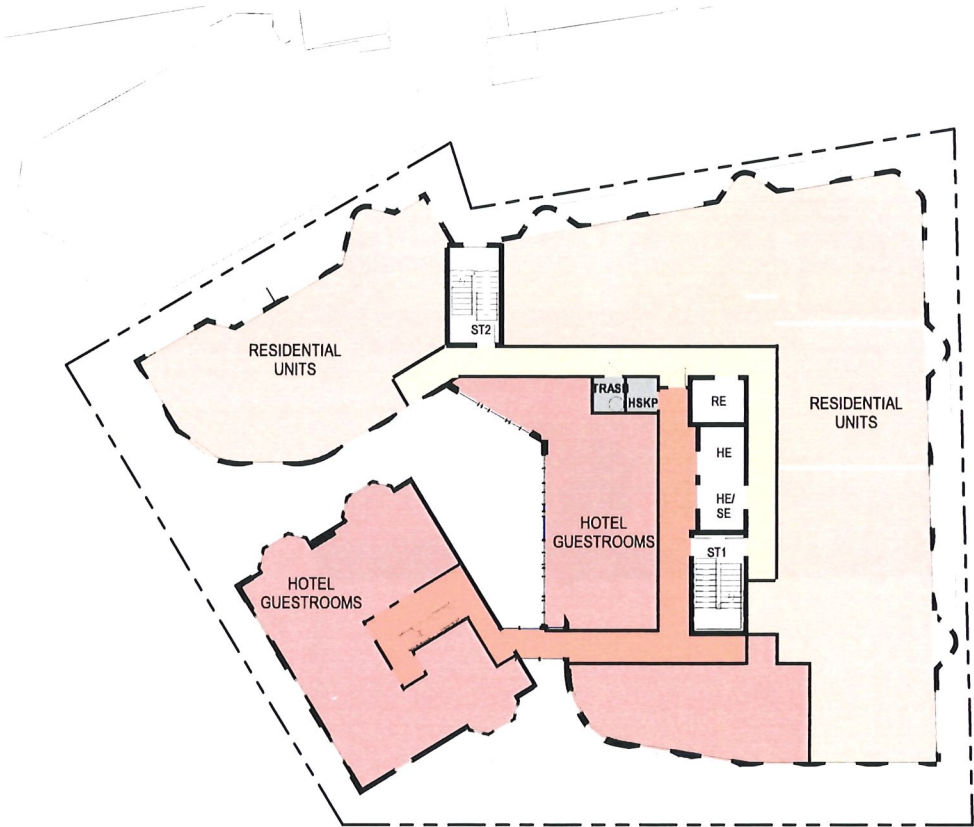
127 Mt Auburn / 17 Story St.



B1 Floor



1st Floor



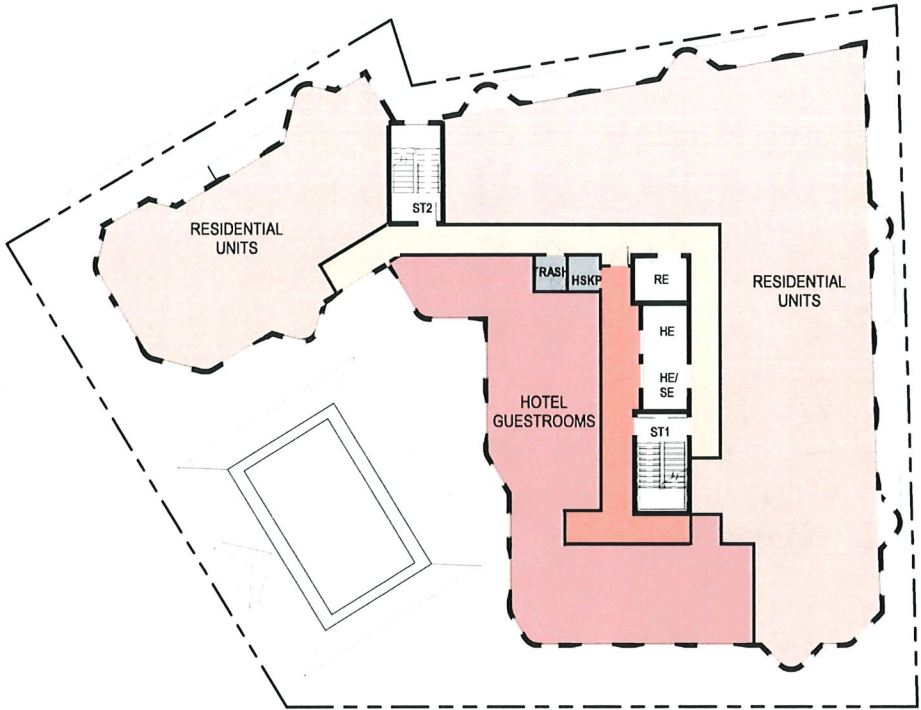
2nd Floor



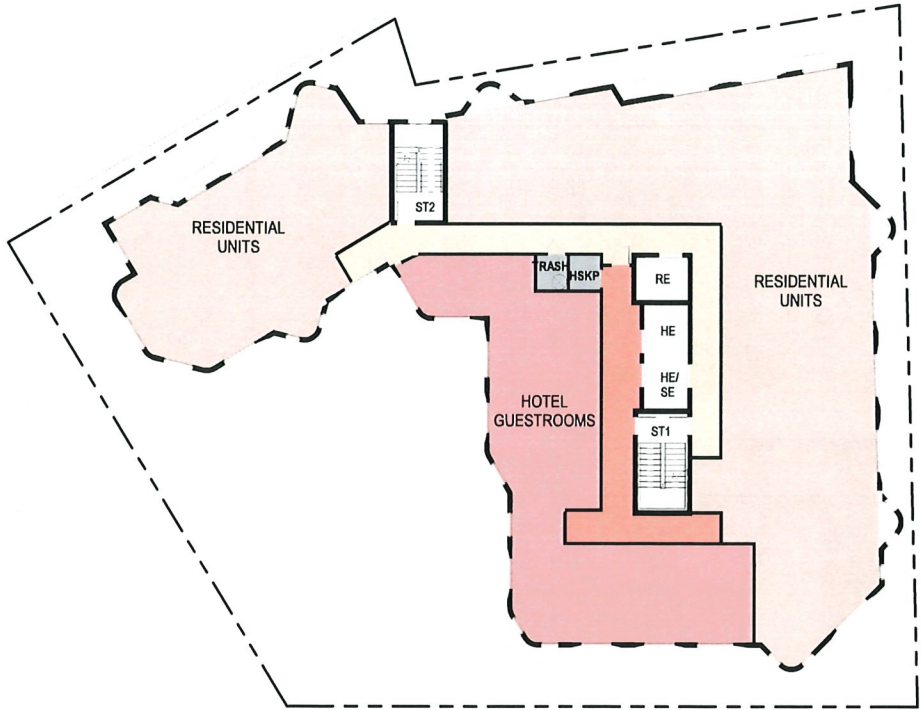
3rd Floor

Project Floor Plans

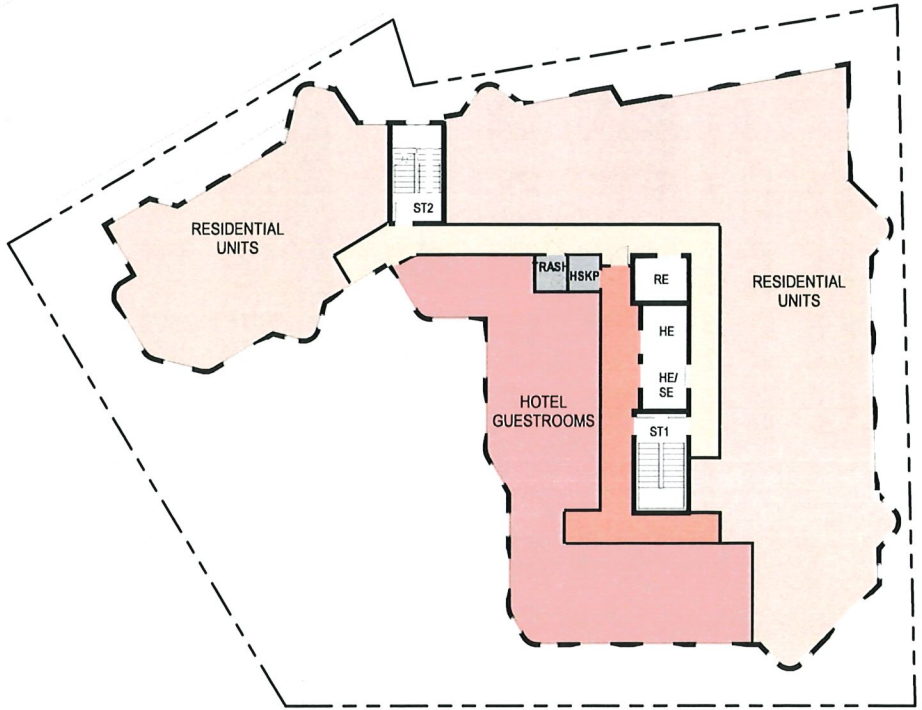
127 Mt Auburn / 17 Story St.



4-6th Floor



7th Floor



8th Floor



Roof Floor

Proposed Elevations



South Elevation



West Elevation



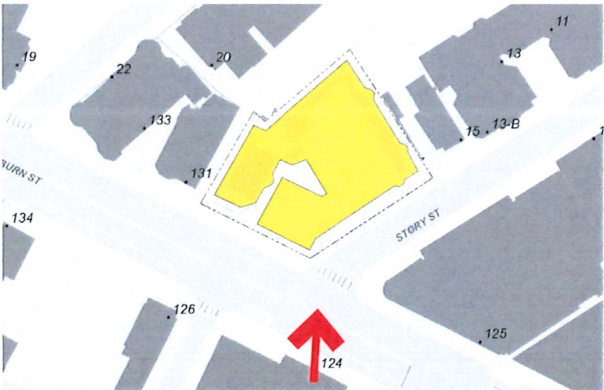
North Elevation



East Elevation

Proposed View

From Mt. Auburn St. - Summer Morning

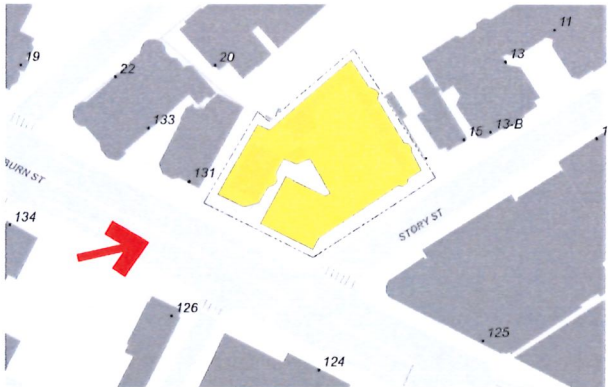


Existing View



Proposed Views

From Mt. Auburn St. - Summer before Noon

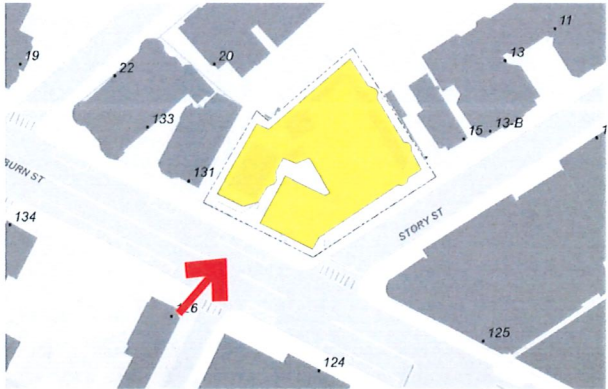


Existing View



Proposed View

From Mt. Auburn St. - Summer Noon

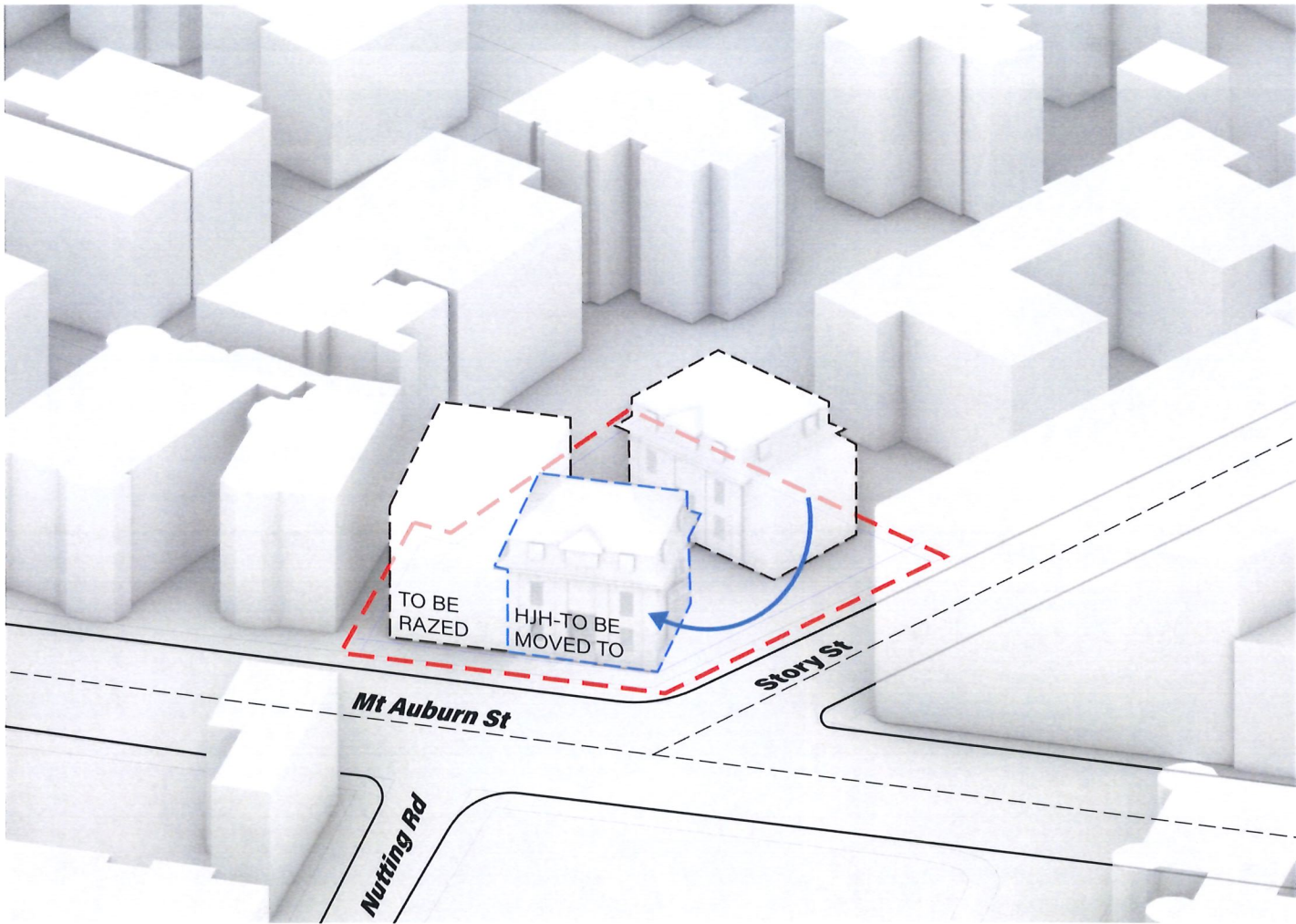


Existing View

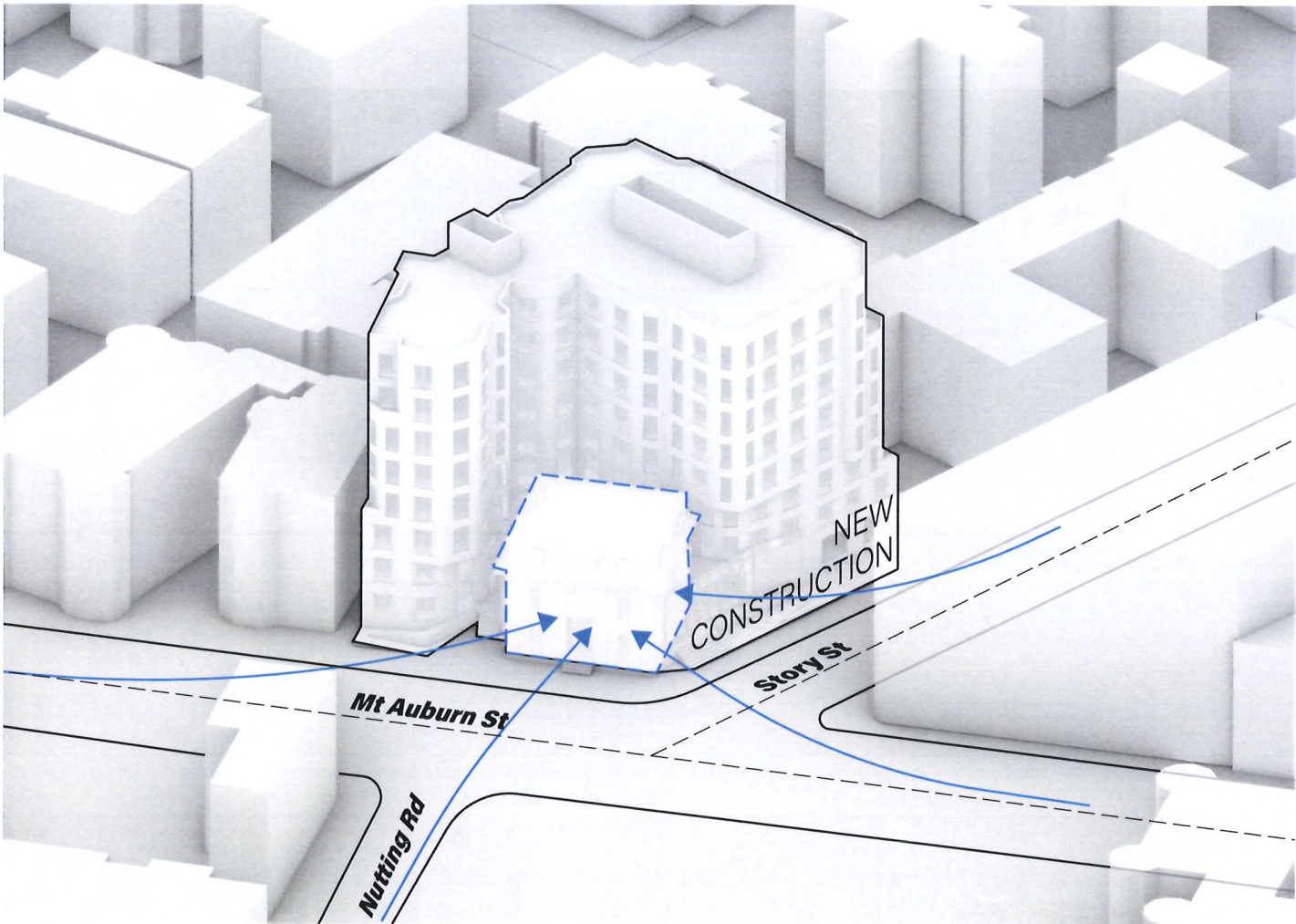


Urban Diagrams

Harriet Jacobs House Relocation



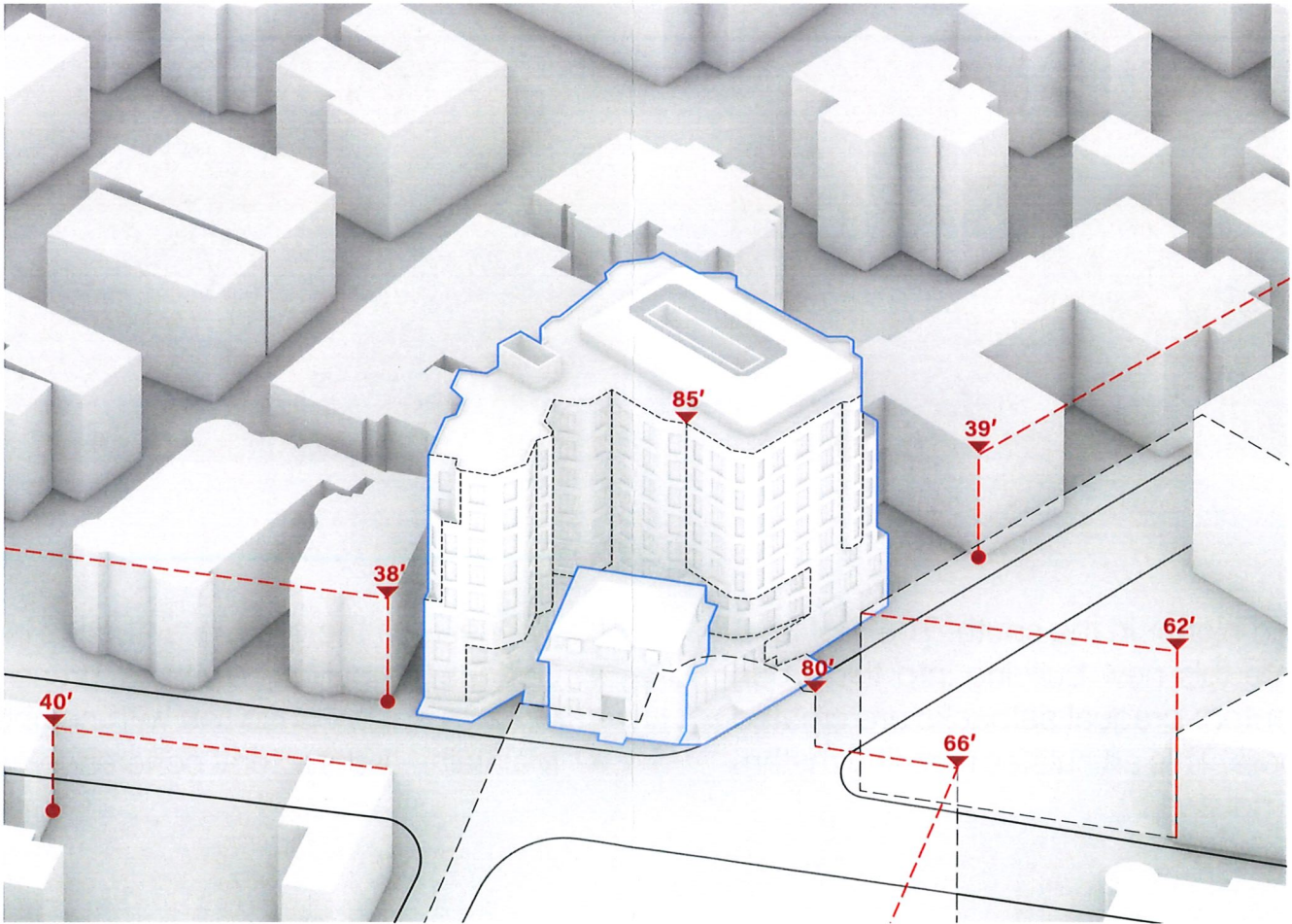
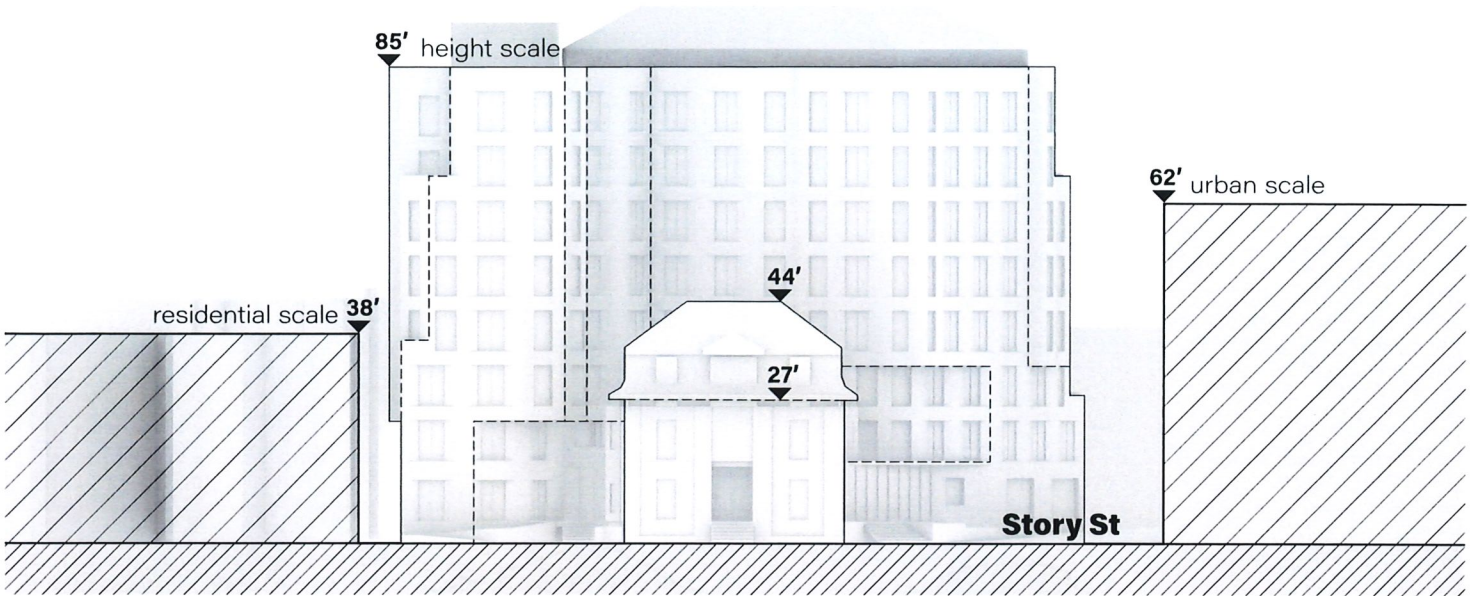
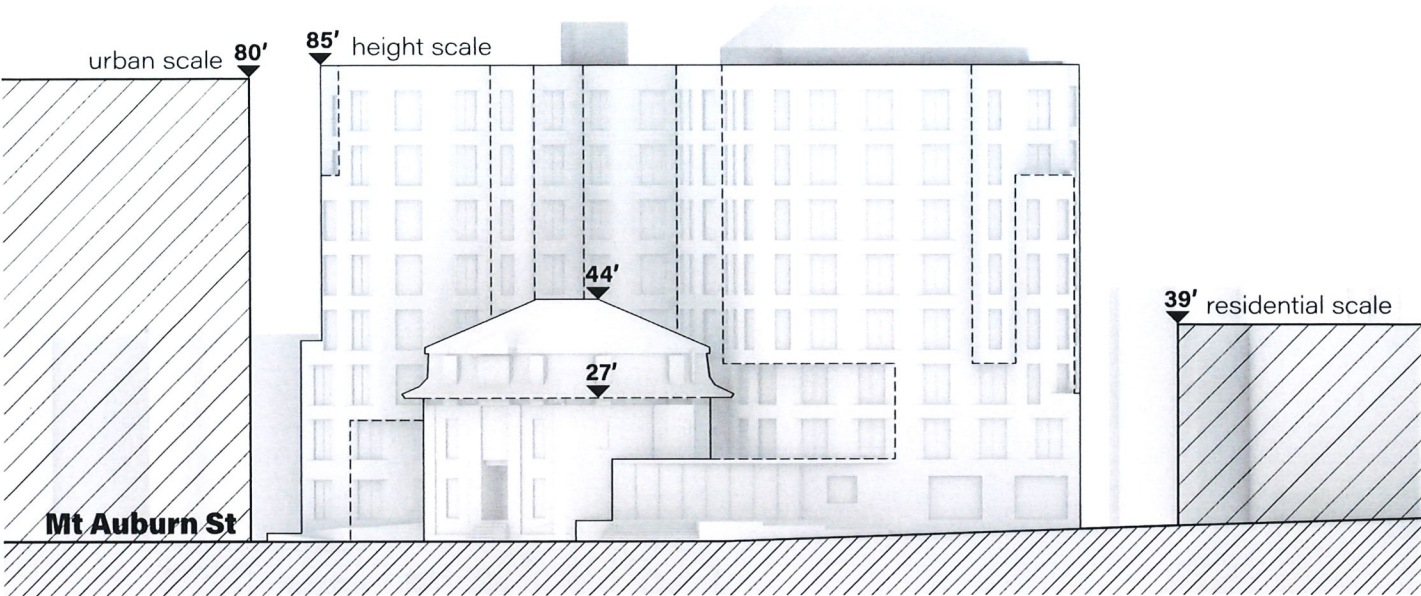
The building at the Northwest corner of the site will be razed as part of the redevelopment plan. Harriet Jacobs House will be relocated from its current position on Story Street to the street corner,significantly improving its visibility and presence within the urban context.



Harriet Jacobs House becomes easily accessible and recognizable from Mount Auburn Street, Story Street and Nutting Road. The new building will be constructed around it.

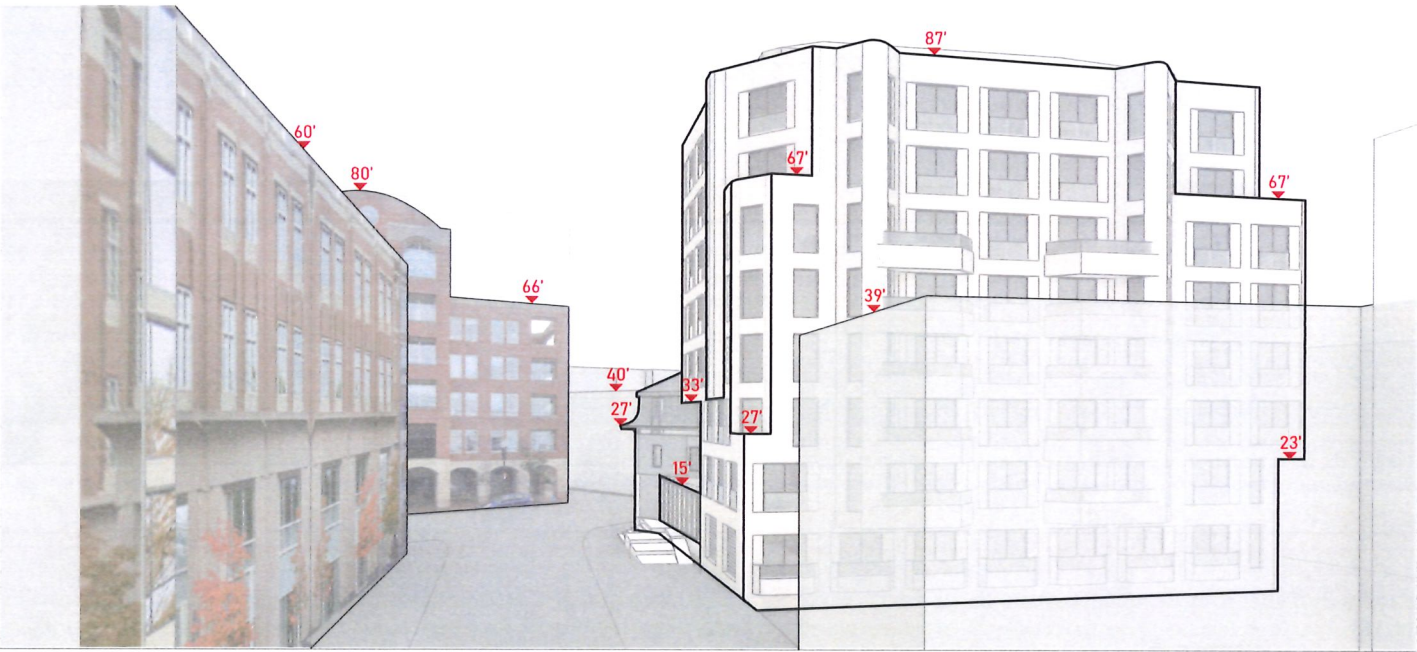
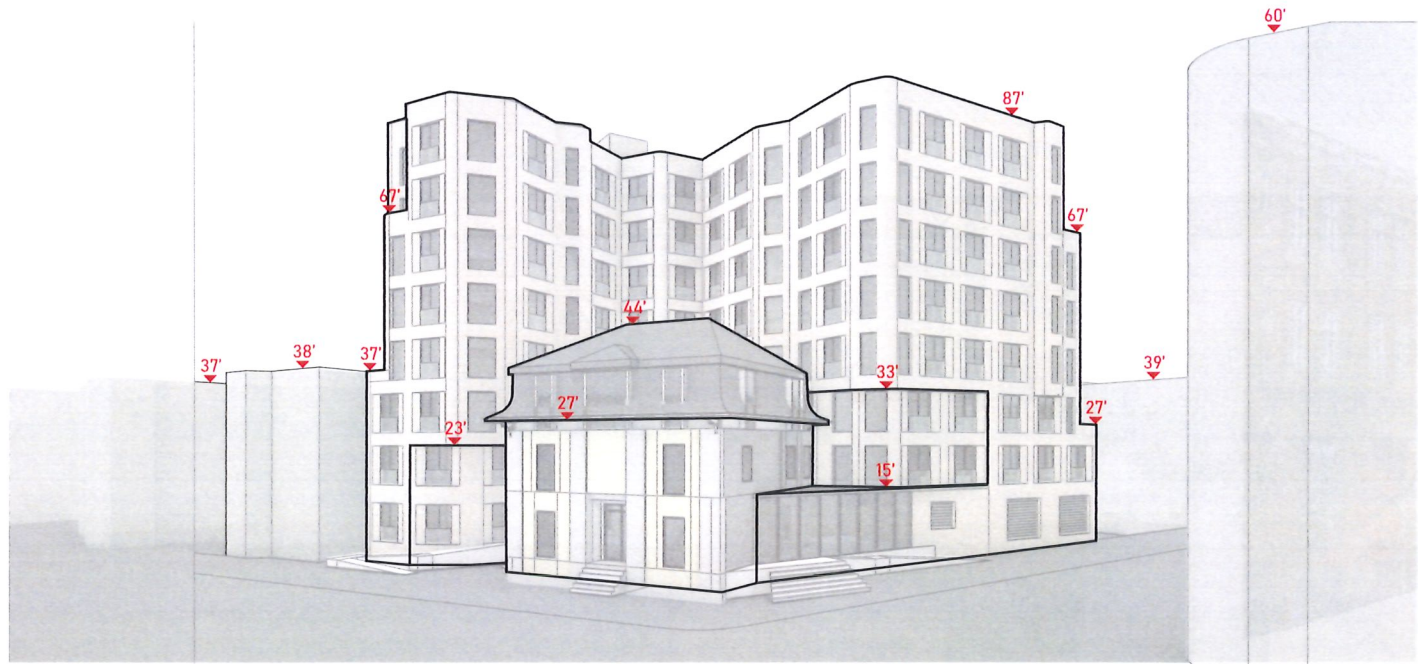
Urban Diagrams

Height Control



Building Diagrams

Concept Massing Strategy



The surrounding area is generally lower in the north and higher in the south. The roof level of the new building will be 85' tall. To better integrate this new building into the urban fabric, strategic massing treatment has been implemented: gradual setbacks are created through chamfered corners at internals of every 2-3 floors. This articulates massing rhythm visually dialogues with the 2-3 story scale of adjacent houses.

- Key benefits of the gradual setbacks include:
- Softens the building's vertical presence
 - Creates scale transitions with neighbouring context
 - Maintains architectural coherence while achieving required height

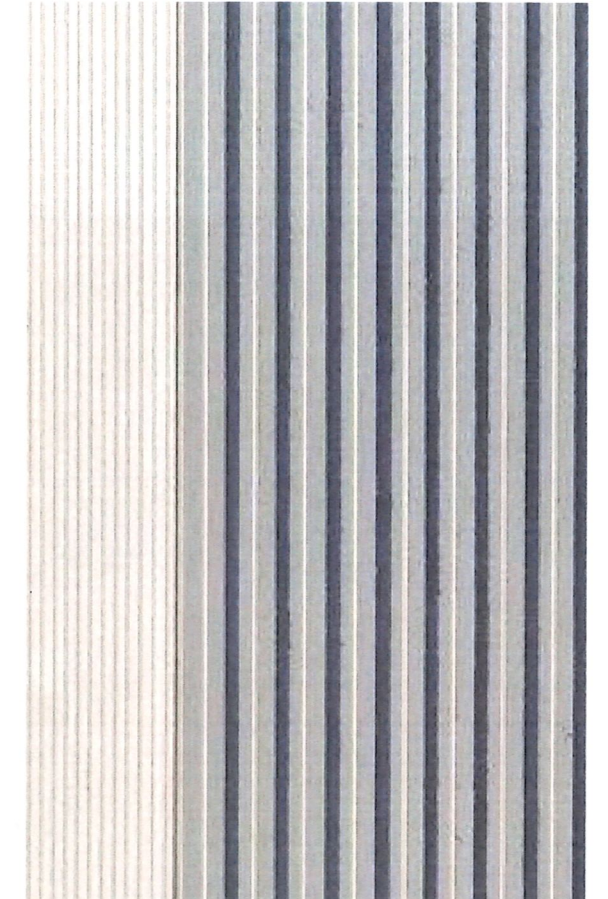
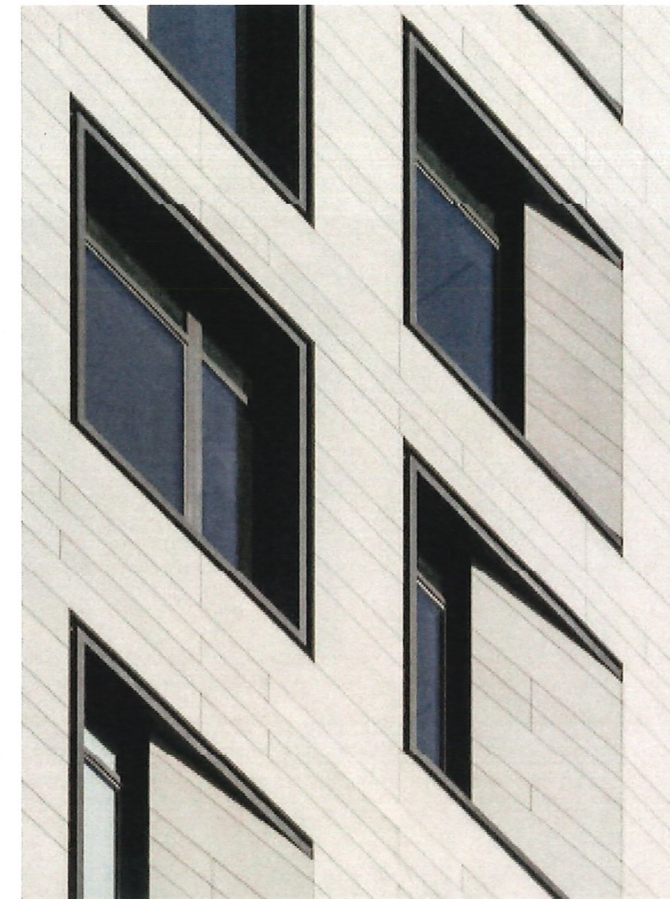
Proposed Materials

Exterior Cladding



Harriet Jacobs House

- Renovated, painted flush board and clap board siding and trim.
- All windows to be replaced with insulated wood windows to match historic muntin pattern.



Hotel + Residential

- Rainscreen exterior cladding is a sophisticated building envelope system designed to protect a building's structure from the elements while enhancing its performance and durability.
- Using a through-coloured facade material, characterised by a sanded surface and naturally occurring hues within the material.
- Unique 3D shaped, through-coloured facade material that plays with light and shadow
- Large format exterior cladding material with varying size of window playing artfully

Proposed Materials

Exterior

