Design Review

Charlestown Preservation Society Design Review Committee
P. O. Box 290201
Charlestown, MA 02129

December 1, 2020

Raul Duverge, Project Manager
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One City Hall, Ninth Floor
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Re: Bunker Hill Housing Redevelopment
Draft Project Impact Report (DPIR) Comments

At our regularly scheduled meeting on **November 16, 2020**, the Charlestown Preservation Society Design Review Committee (DRC) listened to a virtual presentation by architects from Stantec on the proposed Bunker Hill Housing Redevelopment. The presentation provided an overview of project development to date, communicated overarching master planning design principles, and concentrated on updates to the **Building M** design. The slide deck Stantec presented to our committee was subsequently used for the November 17, 2020 presentation to the Boston Civic Design Committee.

Following the formal presentation, members of the project team (Stantec and Leggat McCall Properties) solicited questions and comments from DRC members as well as those submitted from the general community through the Zoom Webinar platform. The following is a summary of questions and comments from the discussion organized by topic.

Master Planning Design Principles

1) Our committee appreciated the re-emergence of overarching design principles for the development. We look forward to these principles being formalized in the BPDA approvals documentation for the project.
2) The master plan framework should be flexible enough to permit a range of architectural responses (from traditional to contemporary) both today and over the years-long build out of the project. This diversity within a framework could be supported by engaging a variety of architects for individual or groups of buildings.
3) The sustainability goals for the project are commendable, particularly striving for Passive House standards for energy efficiency. Additionally, the use of renewable building material such as Cross Laminated Timber (CLT) and pre-fabricated panelized construction will have a positive impact on

embodied carbon reduction and also have the benefit of more efficient and faster on-site construction period. However, as presented, this approach to prefabrication has limits on the shape (orthogonal buildings), amount of articulation (exterior walls must stack vertically), and location and size of fenestration. We recommend the proponent carefully weigh the benefits of prefabricated construction with the potential drawbacks to having the flexibility to articulate the building envelope in a manner that truly reflects its context.

4) We appreciate the intent to develop both "fabric" and interspersed "object" buildings as means to break down the scale of blocks and add a layer of hierarchy to the development. However, care should be taken to the scale and location of such buildings so that they do not appear too out of place with the immediate context or neighborhood.

5) The proposed "Morse Code" approach to façade articulation is notable and will likely result in a dynamic and varied expression to the overall development. However, the same level of consideration should be made to the vertical differentiation of façades (articulation of a base at grade, a middle, and a top should be studied). Consider including the "Morse Code" diagrams on rendered elevations to show this concept implemented on the building. Study façade designs (articulation and materiality) which differentiate between "parkscape" (e.g., buildings that front greenspaces) vs. streetscape.

6) Our group strongly advocates including stoops and recessed doors where possible to give street character and some differentiation. We understand the inclusion of stoops is not universally supported among the current residents and there may be challenges with accessibility; however, where possible, they should be included in the design.

Building M

1) Due to the orthogonal nature of the footprint, the placement and orientation of the building creates a triangular slice of space between the façade and street edge. It is suggested that this relationship be further explored from ground level to determine whether the space feels residual or awkward. Study opportunities to break the rigid orthogonality of the plan to better address street frontage.

2) The simplified building elevations and articulation of bays as presented is seen as an improvement over previous iterations of the design. Carefully consider window aspect ratios to avoid a dominant horizontal reading. Windows within the Charlestown context have a predominantly vertical orientation. Also avoid extensive use of large wall openings of grouped windows.

Building F

1) Study opportunities to better scale the building by articulating the base, middle and top. The massing of Building F is significant when looked at opposite the existing Kennedy School building. Carefully consider the relationship and scale shift between these two buildings.

2) Examine the building's entry sequence through the front-facing (Moulton Street) courtyard. There appears to be a significant grade change from street level to entry which may make access challenging or difficult to navigate. Consider entry opportunities from Sam Morse Way.

3) The current building articulation and materiality could exist in any context and do not yet reflect the Charlestown neighborhood in the same manner as Building M.

Building C

1) While building heights remain a concern for the entire Charlestown community, added focus should be paid to the visibility of Building C as seen from the Bunker Hill Monument and surrounding historic fabric. Recommend sightlines be studied for varying perspectives in and around the Breed's Hill neighborhood. Serious consideration should be made to reducing the height of this building (by 4-stories) to an elevation at least in alignment with the Monument base elevation (79').

Building J

1) Buildings facing onto the primary green spaces within the development should include ground level public/commercial spaces with greater level of openness and articulation on this level.

2) Because of its location at the bend in Medford Street, consider incorporating a vertical element at the building corner as a means of identification and wayfinding to the adjacent open space.

The Charlestown Preservation Society is dedicated to protecting the architectural character of our community. We appreciate the opportunity to comment on a project which will fundamentally change the fabric of our neighborhood. We also thank and acknowledge the project team for presenting to our organization and look forward to continued dialogue as the project progresses into the next phase of design and approvals.

Sincerely,

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cc.: Lydia Edwards, Boston City Council
Quinlan Locke, Office of Neighborhood Services