

TOWN OF BOXBOROUGH
DESIGN REVIEW BOARD



Design Review Report
984 & 996 Massachusetts Ave.
Submitted: January 23, 2019

**Draft by the Boxborough Design Review Board
February 13, 2019 as a voluntary advisory input in
preparation for scheduled February 25, 2019 Planning Board
Public Hearing**

Design Attributes and Guidelines

The Design Review Board derives its authority and responsibilities from Boxborough Zoning Bylaw Section 8100. Under Boxborough Zoning Bylaw Section 4450, Special Permits for Residential Uses, in the B1 District, the Planning Board is required to consider the design review elements, specifically that “(5) The proposal conforms, to the maximum extent possible, the applicable standards set forth in Section 8100 Design Review under Section 8105 Design Attributes and Guidelines.” The Design Review Board, being proactive in providing input in advance of the February 25, 2019 Planning Board Public Hearing on project provides these inputs as voluntary and advisory for consideration of the Planning Board. The Design Review Board reviewed the project submission, absent a Design Review Application, but with a majority of the exhibits provided as part of the Applicant’s special permit submission to the Planning Board stamped January 23, 2019.

The Design Review Board reviewed the proposed project plans for the properties at 984 & 996 Massachusetts Avenue under the Boxborough Design Review Guidelines 2.0, dated December 12, 2018. The review to the attributes follows:

1. Rhythm of Solids and Voids

The architectural quality of building elevations is determined, in large part, by the “rhythm” or “patterns” of the architectural elements on the elevation. The architecture for this proposed development is very dense and provides a considerable visual impact along Massachusetts Avenue.

The modern windows arrangement is not representative of guidelines defined symmetry or rhythm (photo-like renderings, page 1 and 2). While the back rendering has a symmetry, it also has a panopoly of opening heights and rows of door like lights above main windows (photo-like renderings page 2, top right). The hand drawn back and side elevations show better placement of windows, more traditional overhung windows, better separation of elements, and presentation overall in contrast to the photo-like renderings.

2. Façade and Openings

The facades have most elements inconsistent with the Design Guidelines, understanding that this development was not anticipated/planned consistent with Town Center, a village core, nor

mixed-use. In design, the provided renderings are a stark contrast to, for example, Architectural Elements workshop, 972 Massachusetts Avenue.¹

The majority of the window proportions do not appear to meet the maximum and minimum height/width ratios from the Design Guidelines (height 1.5 to 1.9 times the width) as separated (not ganged²) windows. Despite being the closest in windows height:width ratio on the rendered rear of the building (photo-like renderings page 2, top right), the characteristics addressed in 1. Rhythms of Solids and Voids persist.

3. Massing and Spacing of Buildings

The proposed plan intentionally does not have the elements intended for a Town Center complex, e.g., a village core, business district, and combinations of sizes of buildings. Despite being two family residences, the density in general appears to be more like a “city block,” albeit on a significant sloping grade (Layout & Materials Plan).

4. Placement and Orientation of Buildings within a Lot

The grade changes from the front of the buildings to the rear are significant (Grade, Drainage & Utility Plan). The type of sound proofing fence and integration into the site is unclear.

5. Architectural Details, Materials, and Color

Molding and trim is used to decorate or finish building surfaces and doors. This appears successful on the formal entrance rendering (photo-like renderings page 2, top right) with the exception of the 4 column entry portico (columns too thin, not tapered) and the horizontal pediments at the triangle bottom of the gable ends and dormers. The keystone top window trim adds some decorative variety.

Clapboards should be the 3”, 4”, and at most 4.5” of the material specifications with series according to the Design Guidelines. Where wall shakes may be planned, they would add variety but shakes only used in the upper gable end combined with clapboards on the main floor elevation is a pseudo-neo-Victorian detail for variety but not encouraged nor within the target style date range.³ The hand drawn back and side elevations show better clapboard height and better detail presentation in general.

¹ This building presents a New England and a Design Guidelines target period appropriate building as a matter of good design and architecture independent of town design guidelines.

² Windows immediately next to each other in series with no wall/solid separation other than window trim.

³ While the hand drawings show a consistent clapboarding, it is unclear if the photo-like rendering are indicating wood (or faux) shingle exterior surfaces.

Colors seem dark/muted if not fully consistent with target guideline period colors with the notable exception of the bright color rear facing elevation, highlighting the least appealing flat surface including to Rte 111 render (photo-like renderings page 1, top left and page 2, top right).

6. Roof Slopes and Shapes

Roof slopes are low compared to guideline far less than 8 over 12 (rise over run) on buildings. The roof and dormer presentation on the elevation with garage doors seem to have good shapes and peaks at least obfuscating the long low slope of the main roof (photo-like renderings page 2, top right). In contrast the rear render (photo-like renderings page 2, top right), is a flat long expanse with aforementioned long flat façade, sometimes street facing. Gable end roof photo (photo-like renderings page 1, bottom left and page 2, bottom) show very squat proportions.⁴

7. Signage and Lighting

Plans do not indicate any permanent approach signage, which is welcome. The Grading, Drainage, and Utility Plan and lighting detail sheets indicates a few bottom directed lamps which appear appropriate.

8. Landscaping

The Landscaping Plan (and detail sheet) and Plant Schedule is included in materials. The trees, shrubs, groundcover and ornamental grasses do not include species to be avoided and include a number of the recommended species.

Anticipated significant exposure between the ground level and the siding on any building is not directly addressed except with rendered tall bit-mapped vegetation.⁵ It is unclear if a slope walls,⁶ steps, etc. will be sufficient to soften the appearance of this grade change. The series on conifers (photo-like renderings page 1, top left) does not obscure the façade from Massachusetts Ave.

Conclusion

The Design Review Board recommends the Planning Board address if the proposal conforms, to the maximum extent possible, the applicable standards set forth in Section 8100 Design Review under Section 8105 Design Attributes and Guidelines. Taking into consideration the zone

⁴ The short just out on these gable ends is not completely decorative, but the peak within the peak variation is very modern vs functional for such a short depth.

⁵ Question if photo-like renderings page 2, top right represents vegetation or some other surface cover?

⁶ including any retaining walls or information on how grade changes from the front of buildings to the rear and the rear.

designation differences, the development is not consistent with the guidelines. The inclusions most closely consistent with the guidelines⁷ are the hand drawn side and back elevations and possibly some improved front elevation details.

Boxborough's general character is summed up in the phrase "scenic, historic, and rural character." While it is somewhat subjective as to whether any of the non-guideline design elements are aesthetically pleasing, including in the context of the B1 district, as presented, the project will be a dense packed contrast to scenic, historic or rural, including the tree canopy and adjacent structures.

⁷ Except the roof slopes and gable end protrusions.