Development Review Application
Project Narrative

73 Summer Street, Somerville MA
June 14, 2021

The residential project under consideration seeks to bring (27) rental units to market, (5) of which are affordable, within a Three-Story building containing subterranean parking for (18) vehicles and resident bike parking facilities at a ratio of 2.0 bikes/dwelling unit. In addition to containing off-street parking, the basement level also features a resident amenity space, dubbed a 'Work from Home Hub' along with the main building utility rooms and a storage area for future battery/energy storage integration systems. An outdoor amenity space is also provided for building resident's use, in the form of a habitable green roof, and is located on the far corner of the Eastern portion of the lot along School Street and partially overlaps the subterranean parking below. The amenity courtyard is either accessed via ramp/stairs directly from School Street or is accessible from the 1st residential floor level through the main building corridor. The outdoor amenity space is raised in height from the sidewalk (to match the raised height of the 1st residential level) such that it provides some privacy buffer to the adjacent streetscape, yet by design it remains fully integrated with the pedestrian scale. The raised amenity courtyard is designed as a mix of hardscape surfaces (wood paver) and green roof vegetation which further help to break down the massing strategy of the building while giving building residents adequate outdoor space located off the street. In addition to the amenity courtyard, the project also proposes to add a small parklet located along the Eastern corner of the site which is designed to become an extension of the public realm and forms a small green buffer from the sidewalk to the edge of the building. This area will be outfitted with a bike rack, a bike fix-it station, and bench and is intended to be accessible by all – not just the residents of the building. The project is designed to meet the USGBC standard of LEED Gold Certifiable.

Through the Neighborhood and UDC Design Review Process, the most tangible feedback given was to ensure that the proposal does not appear excessively 'bulky' in terms of massing, that the building does not lack contextuality nor material relationships to adjacent structures, and that given the proposed façade lengths, the design take on the appearance of two separate buildings by way of manipulation in massing and articulation of architectural elements. As further exemplified below, the proposed development aims to meet these goals and deliver a building which successfully integrates into the existing urban fabric.

Siting, Massing & Bulk

The siting of the building within the 14,573 SF lot is a delicate manipulation of defining the urban edge condition along both Summer and School Streets while also respecting the relief needed at the pedestrian level due to the site's relationship to the adjacent intersection. With respect to site access, the project is designed to utilize one of the existing four curb cuts on the site and will infill the other three which exist. Please reference Image 'A' below. The curb cut located furthest from the intersection of Summer/School Streets was selected for the location of the vehicular access point to the site, which is a ramp providing ingress/egress down to the lower parking level.

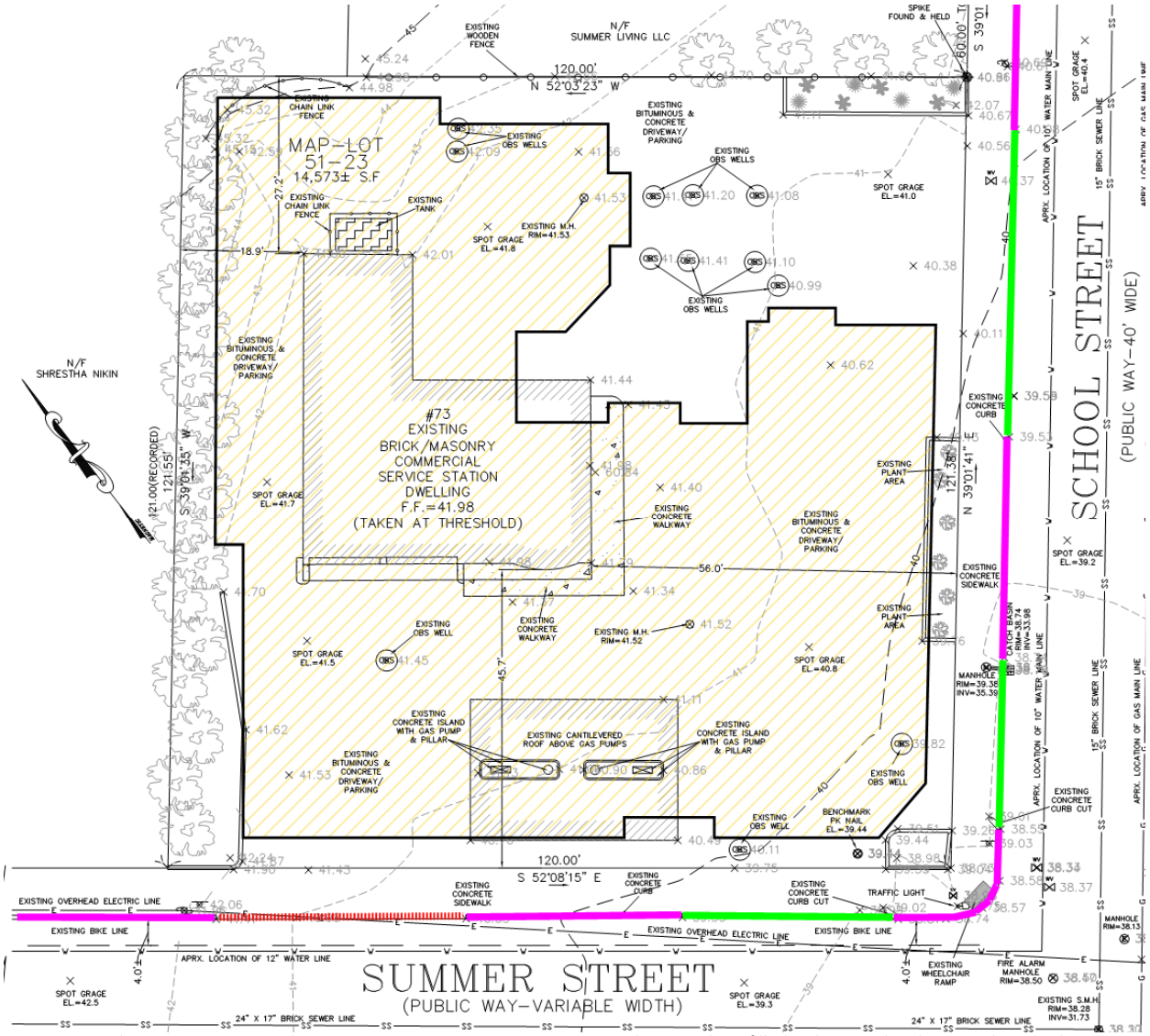

Image 'A' (Pink Lines = existing curbing to remain; Green Lines = existing curb cuts to be infilled with vertical curbing; Red Dashed Lines = existing curb cut to be reduced to a 20'-0" wide curb cut for vehicular access to the project site)

In terms of building placement, the prominent massing of the development is located along Summer Street and School Street yet a 12'-0" setback from the sidewalk to the building edge and the introduction of a chamfer in the building corner at the intersection of Summer/School Streets both play a role in establishing an urban edge while respecting the need for a slight buffer to the street at the pedestrian scale.

The immediate context of the project site varies greatly in terms of building scale; across the site on School Street smaller residential single, two & three family dwellings are consistent with the 2 ½ story building typology with gable roofs. Directly adjacent, along Summer Street, larger scale residential buildings are more typical in a height of three-stories with varying roof and parapet conditions. The proposed building design is reflective of the three-story environment which immediately surrounds, and varying parapet heights are used to give hierarchy to more prominent building volumes and material relationships.

In an effort to deliberately break down the massing or bulk of the building form, various design strategies are employed to achieve harmony between form and function at this corner lot. The most profound massing

strategy occurs at the base of the building, at the intersection of Summer and School Streets, and results in a chamfer across the building's mass as to increase visibility across the street corner and open up the face of the building to the pedestrian scale. Windows along the base of the building in this condition capitalize on the massing expression and provide daylight to the habitable spaces below in the basement, mainly the Work from Home Hub. Additionally, the vertical arrangement of mass within the design is carefully delineated to always limit a two-story expression of any one material or volume before relief, either by means of another material or massing change. For example, within the brick volumes of the building the brick occurs at the lower two stories but the third story transitions to a larger format fiber cement paneling, darker in color, and slightly stepped inboard from the plane of the brick below. Similarly, within the volume at the corner of the building, the two-story expression of large format monolithic paneling occurs at the top two stories of the building and is accentuated by a higher parapet condition yet is limited to a two-story expression as the first story is slightly recessed at this location to provide a more inviting pedestrian sidewalk experience. The usage of different projected bay types within the massing strategy also help to break down and reduce the overall bulk of the building design. The bays are either single story in height when they occur within the brick volumes, or two-story in height when they occur within the monolithic paneling at the corner of the building. The bay's varying shape, as described in more detail further below, help to add visual interest to the design, give the appearance of multiple buildings, and break down the scale of the building. Lastly, the location of the amenity courtyard is deliberately located along School Street, such that it helps break down the massing of this corner of the building which is most adjacent to a smaller scale residential building typology (as compared to Summer Street). Further, the integration of the parklet at this corner of the building also adds to the overall reduction of the building form, and aids in breaking down/softening the building's edge at the sidewalk.

Working in harmony, the architectural massing strategies described above aid in the visual reduction of building scale, allowing the building to emerge into the built environment surrounding it.

Materiality

The most common material used throughout the adjacent context to the project site is red brick masonry and as a result this becomes the most notable material cladding selected for the building's design. Beyond the aesthetic attributes of red brick masonry as the primary building cladding, there is a design and integration strategy behind this material usage which further warrants explanation. Image 'B' below diagrams the movement of brick from the adjacent two buildings on either side of our site through to the two flanking 'end' volumes of the proposed massing. The design strategy is such that the brick becomes a bookend to the design which further helps to integrate the building into the context but at the same time also helps to highlight the prominence of the corner intersection and the building volume that responds directly to it.

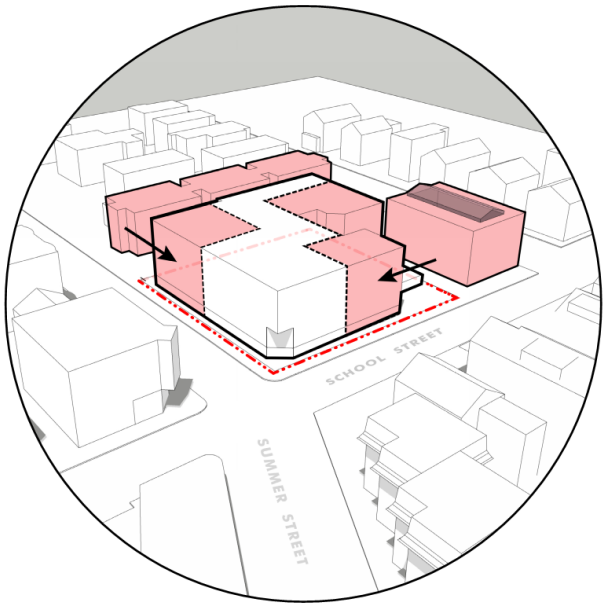

Image 'B'

The building's corner design by comparison to the traditional brick massing is deliberately intended to speak a different language architecturally, one where detailing and material usage exudes a more 'modern' aesthetic. High-density fiber cement panel cladding used in a large format scale provides a more monolithic expression and differentiates in both scale and texture from the brick adjacent. Natural hardwood is used as an accent within this volume, mainly to highlight façade depth by wrapping around windows and major building recesses. In summary, the material selections for the development under consideration are thoughtfully grounded in local context yet balanced such that the scale of the building is successfully broken down and takes on the appearance of two separate buildings.

Two Separate Buildings

The gesture of two distinct façade strategies in terms of material usage and expression of architectural treatments is an overarching design goal for the proposed project and becomes an important language conveyed through the massing breakdown of the building. As noted in sections above, the more 'traditional' brick massing and the more 'modern' monolithic massing strategies deliberately speak a different language, yet unifying design decisions between the two strategies pull the design together as a wholistic design vision.

The usage of projected bays throughout the project becomes a clear indicator as to which massing strategy the bay falls within. Bays within the brick volumes are chamfered, as to relate to many examples within the local context, for example as seen at 8-18 Summer Street in Image 'C' below.

Image 'C'

Within the more 'modern' building massing, the bays are angled to add a sense of dynamic movement to the façade, reflective of the intersection directly below. In both instances, whether the bays are deemed 'traditional' or 'modern' by virtue of where they are located within the building, they are unified in that they are clad in the same fiber cement paneling of similar color.

In addition to the expression of the different bay styles, the window design and patterning negotiates the playful relationship between the two façade strategies. Within the brick, the fenestration design introduces a simulated divided light pattern to the window's glazing juxtaposed to the more modern interpretation of window detailing where the divided lights are omitted, giving the appearance of larger window openings. In both instances, the window proportions remain the same between the two different façade strategies. Further grounding and differentiating the fenestration design is what is occurring within the window openings themselves. The punched openings within the masonry volume are grounded in traditional roots where a precast sill below and solider course lintel above form the overall masonry opening. In the building's modern volume, wood cladding is used as an accent around the window openings to create an angled 'shroud' around the window and form a sloped head and sill condition, further expressing the depth designed into the façade. Reference Image 'D' below.

Wood 'Shroud'

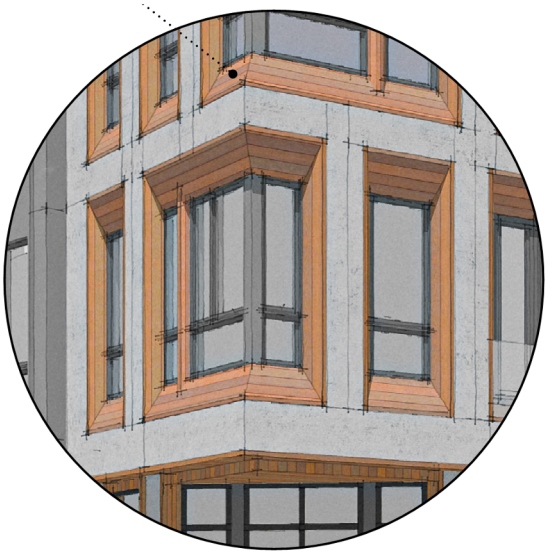

Image 'D'

Lastly, careful attention is paid to the way in which the two building design strategies converge, as to not be abrupt but also form a reasonable termination to the two expressions of architecture. The diagram inserted below, Image *'E'* , best exemplifies the slotted negotiation between the two façade expressions. This slot is recessed, allowing both the brick and the monolithic panel to return, as to give the security that each material is not superficially applied and has depth. The material of the slot itself is fiber cement panel cladding and best relates to the third story of the building, used above the brick base. The design goal is that the third story of the building above the brick simply folds down to engage the ground-plane and provides a distinct yet thoughtful break between the two façade strategies.

The 'Slot'

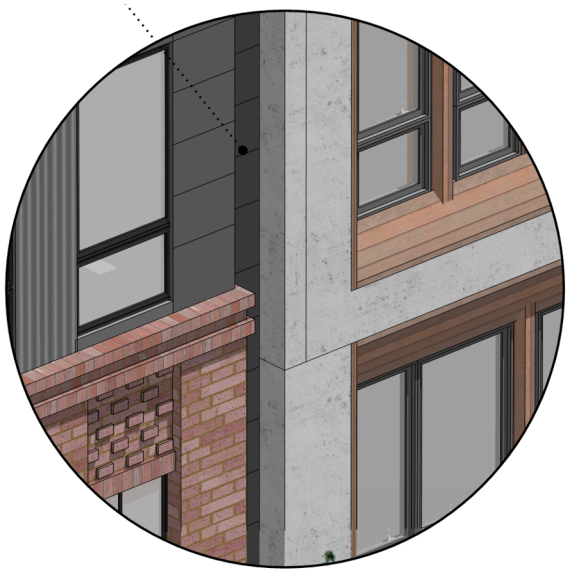

Image 'E'

In summary, between the different material relationships, the successful breakdown in building massing, and the articulation of architectural elements such as the bay & window, the building fundamentally reads as two distinct strategies yet is unified at the 'slot' framed around the intersection of Summer and School Streets.

EMBARC, TRAX, and the entire Project Team are united on the belief that the development under consideration provides a substantial improvement to the local community both in terms of proposed use and contextual appropriateness beyond the site's current usage and we are excited at the possibility of bringing the proposed development to this prominent corner site.

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