



# *Town of Brookline*

## *Massachusetts*

### Brookline Preservation Commission

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Brona Simon  
State Historic Preservation Officer  
Executive Director  
Massachusetts Historical Commission  
220 Morrissey Boulevard  
Boston, Massachusetts 02125

July 10, 2014

Dear Ms. Simon,

The Brookline Preservation Commission, as a Certified Local Government, hereby forwards its comments on the proposed Chapter 40B Comprehensive Permit Application for Hancock Village. The Commission is offering these comments to assist in the review process in compliance with M.G.L. Chapter 9, Section 26-27C, (950 CMR 71.00) which we believe is required. These comments are also intended to assist in federal review and compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (36 CFR 800), if any federal funds, tax credits, licenses, or permits are required for this project.

The Brookline Preservation Commission cannot support the current proposal to build multi-family buildings, roadways, and parking lots in the greenbelt of parkland that bounds one side of this historic housing apartment complex. (The other sides of the complex are primarily bounded by conservation land and the NR VFW Parkway.) Nor can the Commission support the proposal to construct a five-story apartment building on the puddingstone outcropping on the east side of the site. The Commission therefore has determined that the above referenced development proposals, as currently designed, would have an unacceptable adverse impact on this important historic resource.

The Brookline Preservation Commission voted to recommend Hancock Village as a National Register property in 2011. The commission believes that Hancock Village possesses a high degree of integrity in terms of its historic location, setting, design, workmanship, materials feeling and association. In June 2012, the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) concurred with this finding, after the Boston Landmarks Commission also submitted a National Register

recommendation, for the section of Hancock Village located in Boston. MHC agreed that the Hancock Village area meets several criteria for listing in the National Register of Historic Places at the state and local level. Both the Brookline and Boston portions of the property, including the greenbelt, also abut the Veterans of Foreign Wars Parkway, listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2005 and one alternative version of this development plan proposes a curb cut to accommodate most of the project's additional traffic, exiting from the greenbelt onto the VFW parkway.

The first and largest Garden Village housing development in the region, Hancock Village (1946-1949) is significant in part as a collaborative planning project involving the Town of Brookline, the City of Boston, and the John Hancock Mutual Life Insurance Company to provide affordable housing for returning World War II veterans and their families. The housing complex represents an important convergence of Garden City planning ideals, Federal Housing Authority principles and practices of the 1930s and 1940s, and, the then newly allowed ability of insurance companies to own and develop real estate. Nationally prominent designers and firms such as project manager Gustave Ring, architect Louis Justement and Olmsted Associates of Brookline played key roles in planning the housing complex.

Hancock Village remains the earliest documented project of its kind in Massachusetts. It also demonstrated the commitments of Brookline, Boston and the John Hancock Mutual Life Insurance Company to house the veterans' families in an attractive and welcoming environment. Paul F. Clark, at the time president of the insurance company, described the overall design concept of Hancock Village as follows:

The architectural treatment was consistent with local preference. Low land coverage, allotting only ten families to the acre, leaves generous exposure to sunshine and the four winds. A modified interpretation of colonial motives and simple proportions produce on this irregular site, pleasant effects in mass and color.

Olmsted Associates of Brookline, the internationally prominent landscape design firm founded by Frederick Law Olmsted and led in the 1940s by his son Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., designed the initial landscape plan to be an integral part of the complex as a whole. Nationally prominent Washington, D.C. developer, Gustave Ring, and architect Louis Justement, were responsible for the construction and completion of the project.

Consistent with Garden Village ideals and in an appropriate response to character defining site conditions, and especially outcrops of Roxbury Puddingstone ledge, to which the Olmsted site plan responds, nearly half the land was left in its natural state, thereby preserving throughout the site a network of woodland and parkland. Existing trees were retained and the U-shaped apartment blocks were sited to take advantage of views and grade changes. The plan allowed for open space courts behind and in front of the buildings. Parking was placed at street edges to avoid large parking lots or vehicles parking in front of the residences. The overall plan continued the Garden City tradition of residential blocks with separation of pedestrian and vehicular uses. This scheme also allowed for

living areas and bedrooms of every townhouse to look out onto green space consisting of lawns and trees.

The current proposal to further develop Hancock Village, by building in areas that the Town of Brookline and the John Hancock Mutual Life Insurance Company jointly agreed in the 1940s should always remain as open space, would compromise the integrity of the setting, location, feeling and association of this historic housing complex as a whole. The design of the proposed new buildings would negatively affect the existing architecture of the attached multi-family buildings in terms of its design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association.

The Brookline Preservation Commission believes that, even if there were to be some additional housing added, a more appropriate plan and design could be developed which would better respect and retain the historic and architectural qualities of Hancock Village. Specifically, the Preservation Commission strongly recommends continued efforts to protect areas that are particularly sensitive to damaging impacts, including the greenbelt and the puddingstone prominences, such as that upon which the 5-story apartment building is proposed. It is the Commission's belief that, should additional development prove unavoidable, there are more appropriate locations within the overall site and more appropriate ways to accommodate and access any additional units and their related parking.

Sincerely,



James Batchelor, Chair

Brookline Preservation Commission

cc: Ken Goldstein, Chair, Brookline Board of Selectmen  
Jesse Geller, Chair, Brookline Zoning Board of Appeals  
Melvin Kleckner, Brookline Town Administrator  
Senator Cynthia Stone Creem  
Representative Edward F Coppinger