



# City of Medford

HISTORICAL COMMISSION &  
HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

City Hall – Room 308  
85 George P. Hassett Drive  
Medford, Massachusetts 02155

February 21, 2020

## BY EMAIL

The Hon. Breanna Lungo-Koehn, Mayor  
c/o Annie Streetman, Land Use Planner  
Office of Community Development  
Medford City Hall  
85 George P. Hassett Drive  
Medford, MA 02155

Re: Site Plan Review, 280 Mystic Avenue

Dear Mayor Lungo-Koehn:

The City of Medford Historical Commission (MHC) is writing to provide comments to the proposed new 40B development at 280 Mystic Avenue in Medford.

The MHC is not opposed to a 40B Housing project on this site. The City of Medford, like many communities in Greater Boston is in the midst of a housing crisis and we are in need of more affordable housing.

While the City of Medford has only a limited ability to affect projects proposed under Chapter 40B, we feel that the quality of the design proposed for 280 Mystic Avenue is substandard and needs to be completely reconsidered.

After reviewing the 40B package, the Medford Historic Commission offers the following comments:

- The design is a simple, massive, unarticulated box that makes only weak attempts to break down the scale or massing of what will be a mega-apartment building.
- The visual language of the building is extremely limited and lacks creativity.
- Most of the windows in the project are almost identical, square windows, which give the overall appearance of wallpaper. There should be a variety of windows types and sizes.
- The projecting bays – six stories tall and repeated 23 times across all four exterior elevations – are, like the windows, repetitive and uninteresting.
- The minor changes in parapet elevations and cornices are a weak gesture that do very little to make the building visually interesting.
- The basic idea of base, middle, top, which comes directly from a more traditional / classical approach does nothing to enhance or define the project.

- The project makes no attempt to create a sense of entry or to provide a welcoming pedestrian-oriented streetscape along Mystic Avenue. Instead, the design features a bland façade of minimally detailed cast stone and punched windows into a bleak parking garage. The design is inward looking and communicates a bunker like face to the community. The sidewalk and small green strip separating Mystic Ave from the building's ring road will not do enough to create a positive pedestrian environment. Retail or restaurant space along the ground floor facing the avenue should be considered.
- The two courtyards are also inward looking and cannot really be justified as "open space" as they are enclosed on all sides and begin on the third level. They will most likely be shadowed for most of the winter and be unbearably hot "box canyons" in the summer. Opening up the courtyards should be considered in order to create air movement and visual relief for the apartments.
- Shadow studies and a traffic study should be provided that illustrate the impact of the proposed project on the surrounding community. Citizen groups have raised concerns about increased traffic congestion associated with the proposed development as well as worsening the urban heat island effect due to increase densification.
- This project will serve as a precedent for the redevelopment of Mystic Avenue and as a gateway identity building for the city from highway 93. As such, the proposed project, as currently designed, would establish a very poor precedent and serve as a monumental eyesore for generations to come.

The standard by which this project should be judged are the many other large-scale apartment buildings that have been built in Medford in the past decade, including at Station's Landing, Rivers Edge, Modera Medford and other quality large-scale apartment buildings. The design of all these projects as built has been far more successful at breaking down a large-structures into smaller volumes, using a mix of materials, colors and textures to create an architectural language that creates visual interest and a more pedestrian-friendly project.

In summary, the proposed design of 280 Mystic Avenue is substandard and needs to be completely reconsidered. There is a way to design a 378-unit apartment building with the proposed parking and program, but what has been proposed is simply an inferior design that should not be accepted in its current form. The City of Medford deserves better than what is proposed at 280 Mystic Ave.

Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions or comments.

Respectfully submitted,



Jennifer M. Keenan, Chair  
Medford Historical Commission

CC (via email):  
Alicia Hunt, Acting Director  
Office of Community Development