



READING VILLAGE ARCHITECTURAL PEER REVIEW PHASE 2

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Attachment: Notes on Landscape Plan by Holly Ben-Joseph, PLA

Article I. BACKGROUND

SECTION 1.01 INTRODUCTION

- A. This report has been prepared by Russel Feldman and Sarah Oakes of TBA Architects, Inc on behalf of the Town of Reading in relation to a Development Application for the proposed Reading Village Development, a 4 story, multi-family residential development on a 42,658 s.f. lot (as indicated on the Civil Drawings) at the corner of Lincoln and Prescott Streets, Reading MA. (Note site area indicated as 42,931 s.f. in the Project Comparison chart.)
- B. This review relates to program, building and site configuration and building design. We will consider life safety issues but this review does not constitute a full building code review. We have not received CAD documents and have therefore not confirmed the gross building area or building height submitted in the Project Comparison chart.
- C. We appreciate the design responses between the first submission and the current design submission. The Developer has clearly considered many of the concerns expressed in the peer reviews and expressed by the town. Obtaining the corner parcel allowed the development to achieve a more residential scale, offers a much improved appearance from Lincoln Street and the train station, and allows a more efficient internal configuration.

SECTION 1.02 FIRM HISTORY

- A. TBA Architects, Inc. has been in the business of “Supporting the Creative Impulse” for thirty years. We specialize design, planning and project management with a focus on public purpose. TBA proudly serves the public, non-profit and private sectors in Massachusetts and beyond. Our expertise in Physical and Financial Feasibility Assessment, Space Planning, Sustainable Design, Adaptive Reuse, Historic Preservation, Municipal Architecture and forensic analysis ranging from Envelope Repair and Universal Design are the tools by which TBA has firmly established its reputation as a dynamic and creative force within and beyond the design community of the greater Boston area. TBA Architects, Inc. additionally provides developers, underwriters and investors with a targeted review of the critical design to facilitate investment decisions. Through our peer review process we offer our clients quality assurance to better evaluate a project’s development risk and feasibility at every phase from initial feasibility through design and into construction administration.

SECTION 1.03 DOCUMENTATION

- A. This report has been carried out on the basis of the following documentation provided by the Town:
1. Cube 3 ZBA Presentation dated 07 27 16
 2. Cube 3 Unit Mix Chart Issued 06 15 16
 3. Cube 3 Floor Plans Issued 06 14 16
 4. Cube 3 Lincoln St Elevations Issued 06 14 16
 5. Cube 3 Northeast Perspective Issued 06 14 16
 6. Cube 3 Northwest Perspective Issued 06 14 16
 7. Cube 3 Plan Comparison Issued 06 22 16
 8. Cube 3 Prescott St Elevation Comparison Issued 06 22 16
 9. Cube 3 Prescott St Elevations Issued 06 14 16
 10. Cube 3 Project Comparison Issued 06 15 16
 11. DeCelle Burke Site Plan Issued 06 22 16
 12. MKM Landscape Plan Issued 06 22 16
 13. Correspondence with Town officials Jean J. Delios, Assistant Town Manager and Julie D. Mercier, Community Development Director.
- B. Photo taken below was by Russel Feldman & Sarah Oakes of TBA Architects, Inc. during a site visit on March 7, 2016 and shows the three lots included in this development proposal.

Image #1



Article II. SITE OBSERVATIONS

SECTION 2.01 BUILDING MASSING AND SITE

A. Development Use Type: Multi-Family Apartments for Low and Moderate Income Residents. The proposed development is comprised of a single 4 story building encompassing three lots wrapping around the corner of Lincoln and Prescott streets. The site is located at 39 Lincoln St. and 2 Prescott St. including the corner lot between those two sites in Reading, Massachusetts. (The corner site address was not included in this submission.) The development consists of a mix of 1-3 bedroom units, with 72 units total.

1. Comments:

- i. Site Context: The site appears to be well connected to public transportation, residential buildings, local businesses, and public parks. Residents would have excellent access to local amenities.
- ii. Local Site Zoning: 2 Prescott St & 39 Lincoln St. are both zoned as S15, Single Family Residential Dwellings. The corner parcel now included in the design was previously zoned as a commercial location. The Town of Reading has received a multi-unit residential building application under provisions of MGL chapter 40B ("40B") for this site and is receptive to a multi-family development on the site as long as the scale of the building does not negatively impact the residences around it.
- iii. Density: With the understanding that 40B regulations allow for developments to be built within locally zoned areas that would not otherwise allow them to be built, the previously proposed development was adding a relatively high density of 92.41 units per acre into a moderate density residential neighborhood block where all of the residences are predominantly 1-3 family homes. The newly proposed development has decreased its density per acre to 73 units per acre. While still substantial, it represents a 21% reduction in density. This is roughly comparable (actually 5% lower) to the project at 30/52 Haven Street. Should it be approved, it may establish a new context for similar developments in the future.

2. Recommendations:

- i. Multifamily housing is an appropriate use for a site located immediately opposite to the commuter rail, close to neighborhood commercial facilities, as well as a public park.

B. Landscaping: The landscaping plan by Kattman Corporation Landscape Architects has been reviewed by Holly D. Ben-Joseph, PLA. The site includes shrubs along the sidewalk on Prescott St. and Lincoln St. Along the perimeter between the site and the neighboring residences a landscaped disrupted site line has been proposed using various different trees and flowering shrubs.

1. Comments:

- i. The shrubs chosen for along the sidewalks are Ilex Blue Prince which tend to grow horizontally and can become quite large, which will displace the sidewalk if not frequently pruned.
- ii. Evergreen placed at the corner of the property where at the parking lot exit onto Lincoln St. will block sight lines for oncoming cars. Consider a lesser visual barrier.

2. Recommendations:

- i. For the shrubs along the sidewalks consider planting taller, more upright growing shrubs that are easily maintained and will not disrupt the sidewalk. Consider planting lower shrubs between the taller shrubs to create more of a landscaped screen in front of the false windows going into the parking garage.
- ii. Along the back of the property, verify that the Picea Pungens Glauca will receive full sunlight as needed for it to be healthy. Although this is located on the south-facing side of the site, adjacent properties have substantial trees that will shade the area.
- iii. Consider in lieu of mulched sod at the base of the shrubs, plant a low shade tolerant ground cover.
- iv. Consider a more ornamental planning at the building entry.
- v. See attached Landscape Plan for more detailed notes.

C. Scale and Building Elevations: The building itself offers a mix of a brick wall with a flat roof and short overhanging eave, and a clapboard wall with a Mansard roof with dormers on the fourth floor. The proposed height of the building is consistently 45'-2" to the roof ridge as indicated on the Project Comparison Chart.

1. Comments:

- i. The corner parcel has been included in the project which decreased the scale from the previous submission, which is an improvement given the scale of the community and neighborhood.
- ii. The South/Southwest elevations facing the "rear" of the lot is shown on the "Perspective facing North" which provides additional detail on the building and its relationship to the abutting houses on Washington Street. We find this view to be somewhat misleading, in that the building appears fully set in green space.

While neighbors' yards and large existing trees will frame the view of the building, the proposed landscaping, driveway and parking is not shown. Also, the lower level appears open to the windows at grade on Prescott Street. These would likely be obstructed by parked cars.

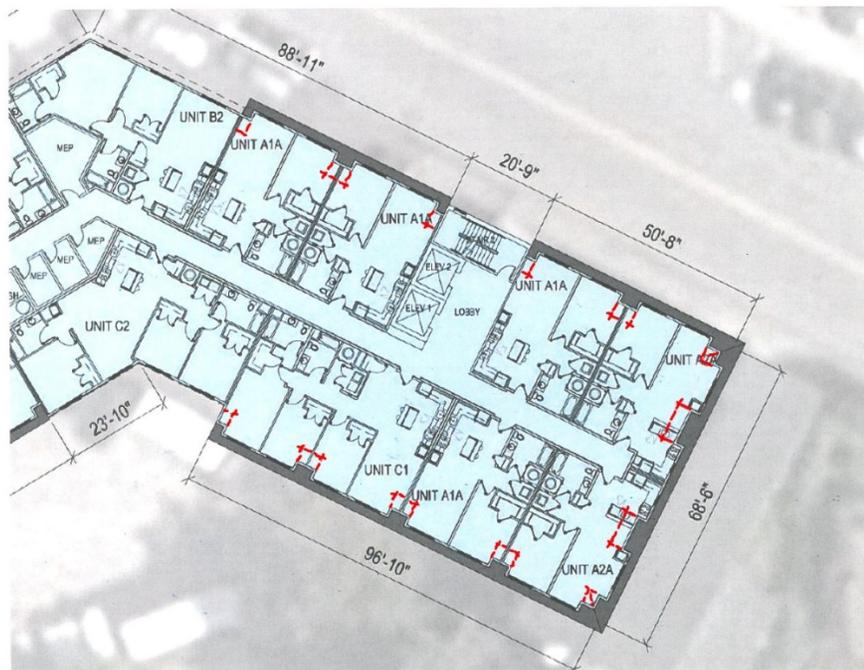
- iii. The residences abutting the site are all under 35 feet high, and fit within the neighborhood zoning height and the commuter rail station across Lincoln Street is approximately 22 feet. This reduced scale of the proposed building fits into the neighborhood and is a clear improvement over the previous design.
- iv. The "Current Building Section" indicates the top of the Mansard roof is 47'-0" and the brick façade section at the corner of Prescott and Lincoln Streets, which is silhouetted behind the section appears approximately 2'-0" higher, resulting in a maximum height of approximately 49'-0" which is slightly higher than the height of 45'-2" indicated on the Comparison Chart.
- v. Although not specifically dimensioned the building elevations include approximately six-foot tall windows for all units, creating a nicely proportioned window with an open and inviting appearance. The balconies, where shown on the elevations, show the window sill approximately one foot above the floor level at the fourth floor and perhaps two feet above the floor on floors two and three. Reducing the window heights to create a more conventional sill height will alter the building appearance.
- vi. The sun shadow studies establish the benefits of including the corner lot in the overall plan and the reduced building height. The studies show that for much of the year the shadows cast will land on Prescott Street and extend across Lincoln Street into the parking area near the Commuter Rail Station with a reduced impact on nearby residences. The worst case is morning around the Winter Solstice where residences across Prescott Street are in shadow. This is similar to the existing condition however, in that the proposed building height is similar to that of the existing structure.
- vii. We observe that the proposed site access is limited to vehicles that can pass into the parking lot. The clear height of 7'-6" limits access by public safety and service vehicles. (See additional comments below). Raising the first floor level to increase clearance into the parking area will increase building height but will also affect the building scale.
- viii. The roof configuration is an important feature to establish the building scale. As proposed, the shingle roof and dormer configuration successfully reduces the apparent scale of the fourth floor level. See detail image (a) on the following page. This has an impact on fourth floor unit size which may not be fully captured in the Unit Mix Summary. See enlarged partial plan (b) directly below,

which illustrates in red the sloped ceiling associated with this configuration. Certain eave areas shown in red may have a height of under five feet. This may reduce the functional size of the rooms. Making the roof steeper would reduce this problem but will have an important impact on the building's perceived scale.

(a) PERSPECTIVE ELEVATION IMAGE



(b) ENLARGED PARTIAL PLAN



- ix. We note that the fourth floor units located on the Southeast (unit types A2A shown above) and Southwest elevations have kitchens against the outside walls. The building elevations show full height windows at those locations, which would conflict with the cabinets.

2. Recommendations:

- i. Clarify the vehicular clearance to the parking area and provide revised building elevations if the first floor level is revised.
- ii. Revise back elevation perspective to include proposed parking lot, cars, driveway, and proposed planting/screening.
- iii. Update the top floor to include ceiling heights and show where ceiling heights change.
- iv. Consider revising top floor unit configurations to accommodate usable ceiling heights.

D. Local Zoning Set Backs: The existing property setbacks required by zoning are as follows:

- Front Yard 15 feet
- Back Yard 20 feet
- Side Yard 20 feet

The developer had submitted a waiver request to lessen the required minimum setbacks in the previous proposal but, as of this writing, has not done so for this proposal.

1. Comments:

- i. The civil drawing dated December 2, 2015) shows the setback minimums of:
 - Front Yard 4'-10" (4'-11" noted on Project Comparison)
 - Back Yard 13'-5" (13'-3" noted on Project Comparison)
 - Side Yard 16'-7"

2. Recommendations:

- i. Finalize site program in light of issues raised about service vehicle pull-off in section 2.02 below.
- ii. Verify with the town that setback waivers will be accepted.

E. Materials: Materials are not specifically described in the proposal but the elevations show a shingle style roof with bracketed eaves, horizontally lapped cladding systems, smooth panel systems, brick veneer and a masonry base. Along the street the building features a commercial storefront and canopies, overhead doors into the parking area at the.

1. Comments:

- i. The hipped shingle roofs, soffit brackets, shed dormers, double hung windows are associated with traditional residential construction of the Victorian and early 20th Century eras. The brick massing and flat roofs create a contemporary commercial element in other portions of the façade, relating to the future development of Lincoln Street. The materials expressed in the elevations are acceptable for the surrounding neighborhood.
- ii. Roof shingle and wall lapped cladding systems seem to blend in with the residential buildings that surround the site. The neighborhood consists predominantly of asphalt shingle gable roofs and lapped vinyl siding.
- iii. The corner along Prescott and Lincoln Streets has a commercial façade with large storefront windows in the “Club,” Vestibule and Leasing areas.

2. Recommendations:

- i. None at this time. We observe that the many materials alluded to in this proposal can be quite expensive to install. Financial imperatives often result in materials that, while similar in appearance to historic materials are, when finally constructed, not as durable as those installed in prior generations. Careful scrutiny is advised to assure that the buildings as actually designed and constructed provide the quality alluded to in the proposal.

SECTION 2.02 UTILITIES

- A. Service Vehicles and Garbage/Recycling Storage: No provision for garbage and recycling storage or pick up, and visitors and residents’ moving vehicles are indicated on the civil or architectural drawings.

1. Comments:

- i. There is no lane for drop-off or pick-up shown on either Prescott or Lincoln Streets, so any garbage and trash pick-up would affect traffic flow. Although elevation dimensions were not provided, in discussion with the designer it appears that the proposed overhead clear space in the garage will be 7’-6”. This will limit the size and type of truck access into the interior of the parking area, where garbage is stored. Depending on the town’s garbage collection system, this may require that garbage trucks pull alongside the curb on Lincoln Street.
- ii. The revised building configuration, with building entry and elevator access on Lincoln Street, may result in residents’ furniture moving vehicles positioning themselves on Lincoln Street. Additionally, visitor pick-up/drop-off will also impinge on Lincoln Street traffic.

iii. The parking area is very tightly configured. Larger vehicles cannot maneuver, which may limit access for tow trucks should they be required.

2. Recommendations:

- i. Service vehicles should have a pull-off for short-duration parking so the traffic impact of this relatively highly travelled street is not exacerbated by street-side deliveries.
- ii. Consider raising the first floor to increase clearance for service vehicles.
- iii. Confirm tow truck access.

B. Emergency Vehicle Access

- 1. Comments: The parcel and proposed landscape plan provides access for fire and other emergency vehicles along Prescott and Lincoln Streets. There is no access to the site interior.
- 2. Recommendations: Confirm with local public safety officials that this site configuration is acceptable.

C. Snow Removal & Storage: No Snow storage locations are indicated on site.

1. Comments:

- i. There is very little open site programmed for this site that might serve for snow storage during winter storms. The parking garage has an open area to the rear where vehicles park outside. This area in the winter is likely to develop snow which will need to be moved. A small sod area to the east along Lincoln Street may serve for very limited snow storage.

2. Recommendations:

- i. Sufficient open space should be provided to store excess snow without impinging on abutting properties or damaging proposed plantings.
- ii. Provide a management plan to address how snow is handled.

SECTION 2.03 PARKING

A. Off-Street parking and Loading / Unloading Requirements-Apartment: The Town of Reading Bylaw requires 1.5 spaces per unit.

1. Comments:

- i. At 72 spaces, it appears that all parking will be for residents only, with one or no visitor spaces or parking for any employees, such as in the Leasing Space.
- ii. The Massachusetts Access Board Code 521 CMR Section 23.2.1 indicates that for a multifamily residential building with 51-75 parking spaces, 3 spaces must be accessible which are indicated on the parking plan. The proposed plan indicates four handicap parking spaces that are included in the 72 parking spaces count,

which is consistent with the four accessible units provided. If at any point, there are fewer than 3 residents who require handicap parking, it appears that the non-handicapped residents will be assigned these spaces. This can be authorized under MAAB regulations.

- iii. No bicycling parking areas are indicated on the site or interior of the building.
 - iv. The building's structural columns are indicated on the ground floor plan between parking spaces, which provides a clearer picture of the structural system supporting the building overhead.
 - v. The parking garage clear height of 7'-6" restricts access for anything other than private cars and vans. It does not allow for most public safety or service vehicles such as fire engines, ambulances, or garbage trucks.
 - vi. The curbing as indicated on the architectural and civil drawings eliminates parking along the entire length of the project parcel along Prescott Street, eliminating 8 existing parking spaces. This results in a net loss to the existing neighborhood of 8 public parking spaces despite adding 72 apartments.
2. Recommendations:
- i. Provide on-site pick-up and drop-off for service, visitor and public safety vehicles.
 - ii. Provide a site solution that does not result in a net reduction of existing neighborhood parking.
 - iii. Clarify MAAB restrictions relating to the use of handicap parking spaces.
 - iv. As a Transportation Oriented Development (TOD), consider providing safe bicycle storage areas on site. This would encourage residents to use bicycles in lieu of motor vehicles and represents "healthy building design," which promotes the physical wellbeing of residents.

Article III. PROGRAMMING OBSERVATIONS

SECTION 3.01 PUBLIC SPACES

- A. Common space as indicated on the plans includes an entry vestibule leading to two spaces, “Club” and “Leasing.” Other public spaces include corridors, trash/recycling, MEP spaces, and the planted area around the parking lot.
1. Comments:
 - i. The Unit Mix/Summary indicates a building efficiency of 86%, which is extremely high, reflecting little amenity in circulation or provision of common areas.
 - ii. For a development of this size there is very little recreational or meeting space for the residents. Public facilities may be adequately served in the neighborhood however community meeting spaces may be desirable.
 - iii. Observations on specific common spaces are detailed below.
 2. Recommendations:
 - i. Consider additional recreational and meeting spaces for residents.
- B. The main entry from the Lincoln Street sidewalk enters into a vestibule where residents and visitors can turn right into a space designated as “Leasing” or turn left into a space designated as a “Club.” Residents turn into the “Club” space which includes access to the two elevators that allow access to the three floors of units, as well as a door that enters into the parking garage.
1. Comments:
 - i. The “Club” designation is ambiguous. If it is intended as community space or other gathering space, it is not served by public restrooms.
 - ii. Alternatively, this space may act more like a like a building lobby. If so, there is adequate space to accommodate 72 mailboxes that this building requires for the residents.
 - iii. We note that the Landscape Plan by Kattman Corporation shows elevator doors opening to the “Club” area. However, the Ground Floor Plan indicates elevators opening directly into the parking area. We assume that the Landscape Plan version is correct: having the elevators open directly into a parked car without sufficient access and turnaround space and the doors conflict with a structural column shown on the plan.
 - iv. Including the mailboxes leaves the space somewhat under-programmed.

- v. There is no direct access to the stairs that lead to the residential level and exits onto Lincoln Street. This discourages residents from using the stairs and will put a higher traffic load on the elevators.
 - vi. Both the “Leasing Area” and the “Club” have large storefront windows, which offers an attractive street level commercial façade. Neither function would seem to require that amount of public display. This may provide an opportunity for collaboration with the larger community and neighborhood to provide display of community events, public art, and the like.
2. Recommendations:
- i. Clarify the intent of the “Club” space. If intended to be used for anything other than a building lobby, consider providing at least one restroom.
 - ii. Confirm that the elevators open into the “Club” space and reconfigure the stair to allow access alongside the elevators to encourage residents to use the stairs as well as the elevator. This represents another facet of “healthy building design,” which promotes the physical wellbeing of residents.
 - iii. Consider a separate resident entry that allows a more direct access to the parking garage, stairs and elevators. Currently if a resident wanted to enter the building from Lincoln Street, pick up their mail, and use the stairs instead of the elevator, they would need to then exit the building to use the separate stairway entrance, or they would need to go into the parking garage to the staircase there.
- C. The “Leasing” space is presumably for use by the developer to facilitate apartment rental.
1. Comments:
- i. The space is awkwardly laid out due to it taking up the space around two handicap parking spaces in the parking garage. It may be larger than required for ongoing apartment leasing once the building is occupied.
 - ii. There is no indication that a restroom facility will be located in the space.
 - iii. There are extensive store front windows; see comment A.1.5 above.
2. Recommendations:
- i. Consider reconfiguring this space to become more flexible for future uses. It could be a space that residents can lease out for parties and gatherings, an office for leasing units in the building, a community space, or it could be intended for commercial use. If this space is intended for commercial use, there may need to be designated employee parking locations within the parking garage.
 - ii. Consider including restroom facilities or permanent storage areas for any potential use group in the space. Depending on the use group the space is

intended for it could be a tenant fit-out situation but a restroom facility would provide flexibility in the use of the space.

D. Unit Level Elevator Lobbies.

1. Comments:

- i. The proposal now includes two elevators, which is an appropriate number given the number of apartments being served.
- ii. The space allocated appears sufficient to meet code requirement to accommodate fire department emergency access and emergency medical services (stretchers).
- iii. The elevator waiting areas only have access to natural light on the ground level.
- iv. Lobby space is minimal but functional for circulation of moving carts.

2. Recommendations:

- i. Consider providing natural light, enlarging the elevator lobby or easing the transition to the corridor.

E. Corridors:

1. Comments:

- i. Although dimensions have not been provided, corridors appear to be five feet wide and as much as 200 feet long with no changes in width or natural light. This is adequate for the use however is purely utilitarian.

2. Recommendations:

- i. Consider providing some variation along the walls, recesses, nooks with lighting to provide artwork, small open areas or exposure to the exterior to provide natural light.

F. Trash/recycling: Plans indicate two bins, which appear to be chutes to the parking level however there are no notes or building sections that allow us to confirm this. If they are trash chutes, this is functional. If not, the space is insufficient for the purpose. Our comments are based on the assumption that they are chutes.

1. Comments:

- i. Dimensions are not provided but the trash / recycling area on each floor appears minimal for handling of large trash bags.
- ii. The configuration requires single stream recycling by the town. We understand that this is currently planned however, should the town's plans change, the area would need to be reconfigured and enlarged.
- iii. The location of the trash / recycling area is centrally located but is not located close to the elevators for ease of removal of any bags that might be left in the designated area.

- iv. The entrance to the trash room is directly across from an apartment entry, which is not amenable and has only a single door.
- v. The parking level would seem to envision truck pickup via double doors opening on to the exterior rear passage.

2. Recommendations:

- i. Consider a larger trash disposal area on each floor.
- ii. Consider larger door access to the trash disposal area.
- iii. Consider reconfiguring the apartment opposite the trash disposal area to avoid having the apartment entry directly opposite the trash door.
- iv. Provide a narrative as to the management of trash and recycling, establishing the size of trash bags handled by the chute system, how residents are to dispose of larger bags or objects, estimates of trash generated, storage of bins and method of pickup.
- v. Confirm that vehicles for garbage and recycling pickup can be accommodated by the overhead doors and can complete the turn clearances required by the parking plan.
- vi. Confirm that single stream recycling is the town's probable recycling policy in the future.

G. Outdoor Spaces:

1. Comments:

- i. Balconies have been included in three units on each floor, which provides an amenity for those units and also animates the building's Prescott Street façade.
- ii. The minimal yard provided does not allow for outdoor activities however we observe that there is a public park nearby.

2. Recommendations:

- i. Consider creating outdoor spaces for residents to use for sitting and enjoy.

H. Egress Stairs:

1. Comments:

- i. This proposal provides legal egress for the residents.
- ii. The egress stair exiting onto Lincoln Street has small, square windows allowing some light into the space. The egress stair that exits into the parking lot has two windows allowing natural light into the space.
- iii. We note that on the ground floor level plan, the Lincoln Street stair indicates a lower level, not shown on plans.

2. Recommendations:

- i. Increase the size of trash / recycling facilities on unit floors to allow for less over filling and odor build up. Potentially create two trash / recycling facilities on each unit floor so that all residents have convenient access to them.
- ii. Relocate the trash area entry door to not align directly with a unit entry.
- iii. Create more variation in the double loaded corridors.
- iv. Clarify the stair configuration or use and size of a lower level.
- v. Consider designs for the egress stairs to encourage residents to use them as more of their everyday circulation. Increasing the amount of natural light, creating framed views, providing interesting lighting and small “nook” spaces for artwork would make the stairs less utilitarian and more inviting.

SECTION 3.02 UNIT DESIGN

- A. Accessibility: No units have been specifically indicated as Accessible Units on the provided architectural drawings. At the scale of plans presented, we cannot evaluate compliance with unit accessibility requirements.
 - 1. Comments:
 - i. Per MAAB Requirements 521 CMR Section 9.4, residential buildings must provide a minimum of 5% of type 2A accessible units, being those with fully accessible bathrooms, kitchens and bedrooms. This proposal therefore requires a minimum of 4 accessible units to be provided, proportionally distributed across the total number of units according to number of bedrooms, size, quality, price and location.
 - 2. Recommendations:
 - i. Indicate which units are accessible on floor plans and in Unit Summaries.
- B. General Unit Design: Apartment designs are generally well developed with no obvious organizational problems.
 - 1. Comments:
 - i. The fourth floor units are reduced in functional area due to the effect of the sloped roof and dormer configuration. See the Enlarged Partial Plan in 2.C above. Given how tightly planned each unit is, space reduction, no matter how small, may have a functional impact on occupancy.
 - 2. Recommendations:
 - i. Provide building section of the sloped roof at the fourth floor to assess functional area.
 - ii. Consider reconfiguring the units on the top floor to avoid awkward or difficult to furnish spaces due to the roof pitch and layout.

