



GRO Architects, PLLC

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To: City of Jersey City
Historic Preservation Commission
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Re: 591 Montgomery Street – Response to HPC Comments

Dear Members of the Historic Preservation Commission,

We thank the City of Jersey City Historic Preservation Commission (“HPC”) for the detailed feedback we received in response to Jones Hall Associates’ (the “Applicant”) proposal for the subdivision of the property located at 591 Montgomery Street and construction of a new 17 story mixed-use building on the undeveloped portion of the lot proposed to be created. Please allow this letter to serve as the Applicant’s response, from an architectural perspective, to certain comments made by members of the HPC and the public during the January 31, 2022 meeting at which this project was discussed, as well as to comments made by Daniel Wrieden, Historic Preservation Officer, in his Interdepartmental Memorandum. The Applicant notes that a separate response is also being submitted simultaneously herewith by its historical consultant, Peter Primavera Partners LLC, which addresses these comments as they relate to historic preservation.

We have summarized and consolidated the comments that were received during the meeting by particular topic. Our responses are noted below with each numbered section in bold.

1. **Massing and Siting of Building** – Concerns expressed that not all buildings are bar-buildings, plan should be cut higher to more clearly show the building envelope and proportion difference between the proposed project and the existing buildings so that the new structure matches the existing one. Concerns with visual density and overcrowding - stated there is no other spot in this complex where a tower sits so close to another tower and would like to see the density of the building footprint.

Please refer to sheet A-021 Site Plan and A-022 which is a new figure ground drawing in which we have cut the plan at three levels to show the progression of the proposed massing as it relates to the existing buildings. 1/A-022 Lower Level Figure Diagram shows how similar the proposed footprint is relative to existing structures and the close proximity of many of the existing structures to one another at this level. The Middle and Upper Level Figure Diagrams illustrate the progressive increase in distance and space between the buildings at the higher levels which is consistent with many of the existing structures.

2. Subdivision – is the subdivision appropriate? Why are we reviewing the drawings for proposed building before the subdivision has been approved?

The propriety of the subdivision is a matter to be determined by the Zoning Board of Adjustment (“ZBA”) pursuant to the applicable zoning requirements. Pursuant to the Municipal Land Use Law and as noted in Mr. Wrieden’s report, the application has been referred to the HPC for an advisory review and recommendation of the historical aspects of the project prior to review of the site plan and subdivision applications by the ZBA.

3. No Trees Proposed. Is there more greenery on the terrace to offset the lack of street trees?

Please refer to sheet A-101 First Floor Plan which shows planters on all sides, around the entire perimeter of the privately owned public terrace which surrounds the building. We have added graphic notation for vegetation in the planters to clarify the design intent. As discussed at the hearing, street trees are not possible on Montgomery Street due to existing bus stop locations and other operational and logistical challenges at the point of entry of the building. The sidewalk is too narrow according to Jersey City Forestry Standards and donations to the City will be made for the equivalent number of street trees deficient to be planted elsewhere at the discretion of the Division of Parks and Forestry. Six street trees are proposed along Cornelison Avenue. Curbs cuts and utilities prohibit additional trees on this street. The project proposes landscaping in the private park area along Cornelison Avenue which provides for several new trees and plantings.

4. Rendered views from perspectives of pedestrian and from automobile. Perception of height and obstruction of Jones Hall and the Beacon Complex.

Please refer to updated renderings on sheets A-800 through A-805 which show the revised design and how it is perceived from the vantage points previously requested by HPC. We have added to the drawing set sheet A-806 through A-808 which show additional views of the project. While Jones Hall is obscured walking or driving south on Montgomery Street, all other views demonstrate that Jones Hall is indeed still visible and that the rest of the Beacon complex is not obstructed by the proposed building. From Montgomery Street driving north, Jones Hall almost entirely blocks the proposed building, and there is minimal impact of the rest of the Beacon complex from this vantage point. The Applicant also refers to the supplemental report prepared by Peter Primavera Partners LLC.

5. Fenestration rhythm and solid-to-void ratio. More vertical emphasis and stronger relationship to existing buildings.

Please refer to new sheet A-200 Solid-to-Void Comparison to Jones Hall in which we demonstrate through a void-to-solid diagram the relationship of masonry to glazing in Jones Hall and the proposed building. We have revised the elevation to emphasize the verticality of the middle section of the building, eliminating the stagger in this area, thereby reinforcing the relationship to the rhythm and solid-to-void ratio at Jones Hall. Calculations illustrate that the glazing percentage in the proposed building remains higher than that of Jones Hall. However, we believe this is consistent with the Department of Interior Standards in that this ratio is reflective of current advances in technology and improvements in the energy performance of glass, thereby consistent with a new building of the current period not to be confused with a historic structure. Refer to revised elevations on sheets A-201 through A-204 which show how all elevations have been updated to reflect this adjustment to the proposed design.

6. Stronger termination and cap? Have a parapet instead of glass railings?

Refer to revised elevations on sheets A-201 through A-204 which show how all elevations have been updated. We have not altered the design of the termination, but have focused on emphasizing the verticality of the middle section.

7. Water retention system? Concerns about flooding.

This is a site plan issue which is more appropriately addressed during the site plan review process. Nevertheless, during the HPC meeting, the Applicant's Civil Engineer Mark Chisvette explained that the Applicant proposed an underground detention system and that the system complies with the Jersey City Ordinance.

8. Senior or low-income units are being proposed?

This is a site plan issue which is more appropriately addressed during the site plan review process. Nevertheless, during the HPC meeting, the Applicant's Attorney explained that the project does not require affordable housing. The Applicant is proposing market-rate units as Jones Hall is 100% affordable as senior housing.

9. Believes that no additional structures have been added to the complex in the last 60 years because it was determined that the campus was complete.

The Applicant refers to the supplemental report issued by Peter Primavera Partners LLC with regard to historic preservation issues. The photograph of the Beacon Complex shown within Appendix B to the supplemental report shows that additional modifications have been made to buildings within the complex. It is the Applicant's position that new construction at this location is appropriate, provided that the Applicant complies with the Secretary of the Interior Standards, and careful consideration of and compliance with the Standards has been met by this application.

10. Concerned about the traffic, pedestrian, parking and neighborhood impacts.

The Applicant respectfully submits that these issues will be addressed before the ZBA at a public hearing when the Applicant's subdivision and site plan application is heard. For clarification, please refer to sheet A-100-1 Basement Level 1 Floor Plan which indicates a dedicated ambulance drop-off and access to dedicated elevator for medical use. The proposed project also provides 75 parking spaces. The project is located adjacent to senior housing at Jones Hall and housing in close walking distance, and is located on a major bus route. Bicycle parking is also provided.

11. Concerned with number of variances.

The Applicant respectfully submits that the number and extent of variance relief will be addressed before the ZBA. Although not required, professional planning testimony in support of the application and variance relief being sought was provided at the HPC meeting. Thorough and detailed expert planning testimony justifying the nature and extent of the variance relief being sought will be provided at the ZBA hearing.

12. Believes there should be more community dialogue between the developer and existing owners in the neighborhood. Lack of community outreach – same proposal as previously except minor changes and one floor lower?

Despite a prior meeting with Beacon ownership and calls with its legal counsel, the Applicant has received only generalized objections to the project as a whole. In contrast, the Applicant has received multiple rounds of constructive feedback from Planning and HPC staff over the course of the past several years which has been incorporated into the project to the extent possible and the Applicant specifically agreed to come back to the HPC after the January meeting in an effort to address some of the comments received at the HPC meeting to the extent possible.

13. Concerns expressed that the design of the proposed building should be entirely Art Deco.

The Applicant refers to the supplemental report of Peter Primavera Partners LLC and its discussion of compliance with the Secretary of the Interior Standards. The Applicant respectfully submits that it's contemporary architectural design, which includes a number of Art Deco elements, is entirely in keeping with the Jersey City Ordinance and the Secretary of the Interior Standards.

14. Concerns about loss of greenspace.

The project proposes landscaping in the private park area along Cornelison which provides for several new trees, plantings and recreational areas for residents of both Jones Hall and the proposed building.

15. How does the proposed development keep with the Secretary of Interior's standards for historic preservation when the proposed project would change the streetscape of Montgomery Street and block the view of Jones Hall?

The Applicant refers to the supplemental report of Peter Primavera Partners, LLC.

16. Stated the historic and architectural significance of the campus should not be marginalized and concern that the proposed building is very intrusive; concern expressed that the scale, massing, plan and rhythm of voids and solids is not appropriate for the historic campus

The Applicant refers to the response to No. 5, above, as well as the supplemental report of Peter Primavera Partners, LLC, and Sheet A-0006 of its plan set, submitted concurrently with this letter.

Thank you,



Richard Garber, AIA