



Town of Ashland

MASSACHUSETTS

9-49 Homer Ave

Design Review Committee Report #1

Prepared by the Ashland Design Review Committee

Meeting date: June 16, 2023

Submitted to the Planning Board: June 19, 2023


The DRC voted to continue the project review to July 20, 2023. We expect to see revised drawings and submission items as requested in **red bold** throughout this document.

Documents reviewed and presented at this meeting by the Applicant were dated March 2023.

Architecture / Building Orientation

A. Massing & Scale

1-A.1	6.15.2023	Maximum FAR is 1.5. Proposed project FAR is 1. FAR is as of right.
1-A.2	6.15.2023	<p>Building projections and main entrances along Homer could be better organized and simplified to create a consistent streetscape, larger planting beds, and “pocket parks / seating areas” that relate with the building massing and main entrances.</p> <p>Per the Guidelines, “A well-designed storefront minimizes confusion over which doorway belongs to which business.” We spent considerable time during the meeting working through ideas to better locate entrances at the building recesses to improve legibility of the streetscape for patrons and improve the resulting landscape design/organization. Applicant to further study and present these ideas back to us.</p> <p>The following are markups providing by the Committee during the meeting:</p>

		 <p>The image contains two architectural drawings. The top drawing is a cross-section of a building with a curved roofline. Three red rectangular areas are highlighted on the facade, each with a red arrow pointing downwards. The bottom drawing is a 3D perspective rendering of a two-story building facade with multiple windows and entrances. The building is situated on a street labeled 'Homer Avenue'. A car is visible on the street in front of the building.</p>
<p>1-A.3</p>	<p>6.15.2023</p>	<p>To understand the building in context with the scale of adjacent buildings, we advise that the applicant's updated renderings (see Item 1-B.2) be put in visual context with the Downtown District and surrounding abutters. Whether provided as a photo-montage or rendered to scale, we urgently request clear and accurate rendered depiction of the project in the greater context. No renderings provided to date indicate surrounding buildings in any detail or materiality. Furthermore, streetscape orthographic elevations are to be provided to understand the relationship between the adjacent context and the alignments between the storefront entrances/features and the residential architecture above.</p>

B. Materials & Textures

<p>1-B.1</p>	<p>6.15.2023</p>	<p>White materiality as rendered is not resolved yet according to the applicant and is only a placeholder for future exploration. We need to see a material palette presented by the applicant.</p>
<p>1-B.2</p>	<p>6.15.2023</p>	<p>Applicant to present 4 or 5 material options for review. White and green awnings that relate to historic precedent (as mentioned by applicant) would be ok; to be reviewed in conjunction with a masonry base. In lieu of presenting just a single rendering, we would like to see options.</p>
<p>1-B.3</p>	<p>6.15.2023</p>	<p>Renderings of the building windows and storefronts should show an accurate representation of the intended tone/color of the glazing.</p>

C. Sustainability

1-C.1	6.15.2023	Solar panels were not discussed. Opportunity to be reviewed at the next meeting.
1-C.2	6.15.2023	EV charging was not discussed. To be reviewed.
1-C.3	6.15.2023	Provide more information on how stormwater is treated.

D. Heritage & Historic Details

1-D.1	6.15.2023	Historic ornament is being proposed. Proposing architectural brackets and dentils. When the applicant adds color and materials to their renderings, we will be able to properly review ornamentation.
1-D.2	6.15.2023	<p>The Applicant noted that the ground floor storefront is intended to relate back to traditionally sized and divided configurations. However, as this was not yet readily apparent in the renderings, we would like to note the Guideline's stance on this issue:</p> <p><i>"New buildings need not, nor should they, imitate the styles or details of the past...Newer buildings, for instance, use more glass than historic structures, yet the use of similar compatible materials and matching cornice lines and setbacks can ensure that new structures contribute to the character of the district."</i></p> <p>A greater amount of glass could be more inviting when considering the contemporary notion of connecting the indoor and outdoor environments. Divided lites and transoms are recommended by the Guidelines.</p> <p>Cornice lines are not to be confused with direct imitation of historic cornice details.</p>

E. Signage

1-E.1	6.15.2023	Signs and patios/entrances at the middle of the facade recesses would make sense for the rhythm of the building. Applicant to present a generic indication of signage locations, for tenants and for general Residential building signage.
-------	-----------	---

Site & Landscape

F. Existing Conditions / Abutters

1-F.1	6.15.2023	Parking garage comes within 4' of the property line, thus the fire trucks would straddle the wall.
1-F.2	6.15.2023	We felt there does not need to be a relationship with the train station, as they are different uses and the train station should stand alone as an historic property with cultural significance. The proposed 9-49 Homer design should nod to the historic architecture in materiality rather than being in stark contrast to it; see 1-A.3 above as related to contextual renderings that will help in this review.
1-F.3	6.15.2023	How are abutting properties impacted by excavation of garage level being so close to the property line? Applicant shall consider constructability of excavation given typical angle of repose required for deep excavations. This falls outside of the DRC review but may impact abutters and project cost if it hasn't been thought about.

G. Site Improvements

1-G.1	6.15.2023	Pergolas at the rear seem out of place and too small. Benches located at the sidewalk should maybe be under pergolas. The space is not quite usable.
1-G.2	6.15.2023	We suggest making materials of pavers at pocket park the same as the other hardscapes along Homer within the building recesses. Applicant to provide more information on intended materials both at pocket park and rear fire lane.
1-G.3	6.15.2023	Benches should be part of the interior paver patio space instead of along the sidewalk.
1-G.4	6.15.2023	See 1-A.2 for studying a consistent and simplified streetscape with planting beds and walks relating to the building massing.
1-G.5	6.15.2023	Confirm public sidewalk width along Homer Ave provides enough pedestrian clear space between the existing telephone poles and edge of walk, by providing photos and dimensions. Confirm the sidewalk width allows the Town to clear snow without damaging the landscape plantings. Applicant stated they would potentially clear the sidewalk with snow blowers. <i>A note to the Planning Board:</i> to what extent will the underground utilities (as part of the Downtown Revitalization) extend along Homer Ave leading away from the Downtown? The electrical poles will be very close to the residential upper story windows as proposed. On road bicycle traffic as part of the Upper Charles Trail alignment through Downtown Ashland and

		sidewalk pedestrian traffic could be improved through clarification by the Planning Board of the future parameters around which the 9-49 Homer sidewalk can be designed.
1-G.6	6.15.2023	Applicant to verify the net change in impervious surface from the existing condition to the proposed.

H. Landscape

1-H.1	6.15.2023	How are the plants, lawn and green roof irrigated?
1-H.2	6.15.2023	Snow storage and removal is an issue around the building with minimum area and too much planting. Applicant stated that it would be removed and not stored on site.
1-H.3	6.15.2023	Show accurate renderings of the proposed plantings after 5 years of growth.
1-H.4	6.15.2023	Applicant noted that more landscape was added to be inviting and be a buffer against the street. However, the planting palette should be studied in relation to commercial entrances regarding mature heights, maintenance, 70% native, shade, snow, and salt tolerance.
1-H.5	6.15.2023	Committee comment: Add upright, vase shaped, native shade trees along the rear fence instead of arborvitaes and along Homer Ave. Applicant was amenable to this and noted that they could trim the trees for fire truck access.

I. Sustainability

1-I.1	6.15.2023	Permeable pavers and details should be provided. The DRC cannot select a material that is compatible with such conditions as building a drivable fire lane that straddles an open parking garage below; Applicant must design, detail and submit materials for review.
1-I.2	6.15.2023	Civil drawings were not provided. Information on stormwater recharge, etc will be provided in the package to be submitted with revisions.

J. Safety & Accessibility

1-J.1	6.15.2023	Site is effectively flat. All doors will be accessible without a step. Provide a grading plan to confirm.
1-J.2	6.15.2023	There is a loading zone for only 2 vehicles at one time, which require deliveries across the parking lot. This is potentially a conflict between

		pedestrian, residential vehicular traffic and commercial loading that must be studied. Applicant noted that the delivery times could be staggered and take place before business hours, but we questioned if this was manageable and enforceable.
--	--	---

Open Space & Community

K. Open Space

1-K.1	6.15.2023	Extend pocket park along Homer Ave, making the pocket park intentional and connected to the building streetscape. Reduce landscaping and provide a redesigned scheme that relates to the building per notes in section A above.
1-K.2	6.15.2023	Outdoor green roof is only for residents. Result for geometry of the building. We recommend shifting the north bar to extend the recesses outward to give more space to the green roof.
1-K.3	6.15.2023	Applicant to study solar/shade of green roof and provide information at next meeting.

L. Pedestrian Access & Bicycle Accessibility

1-L.1	6.15.2023	Access to Resi is through garage and a main lobby off of Homer Ave.
1-L.2	6.15.2023	No public bike parking is provided or discussed. Residential bike parking provided in garage; quantity to be reviewed.

M. Signage

1-M.1	6.15.2023	Site signage not reviewed. Location of Resi building signage to be reviewed if proposed.
-------	-----------	--

N. Traffic

1-N.1	6.15.2023	Parking is calculated as a % of building SF as required. ADD District can reduce by 75% and an additional 75%. Applicant has made all reductions allowed by the bylaws.
1-N.2	6.15.2023	Compact spaces have been removed for reasons that were unclear. Other communities don't allow it but what are our requirements? We suggest to the Planning Board to make determination whether standard spaces can be reduced to 18' depth rather than 20'.

Miscellaneous

O. Additional Discussion and Recommendations

1-O.1	6.15.2023	Updated plans to be submitted showing location of additional commercial tenant space at Alden. Applicant noted this has been added to the design but was not presented to us graphically.
-------	-----------	--

Planning Board Memorandum Items

* Date of Memo Item from PB		
PB.1	5.31.2023*	Building materials and colors.
	6.15.2023	See section B, above. However, see also 1-A.3 for our request for rendered context. Upon review of materials, we urge the Planning Board to further the discussion massing and scale as related to the context of the Downtown District. We find as a Committee that the Architectural intent proposed is acceptable per the Design Review Guidelines but cannot but accurately reviewed without zooming out and putting the building in context of the community at large.
PB.2	5.31.2023*	Façade details and glazing.
	6.15.2023	See section D above regarding ornamentation. While not commented on the meeting but to be reviewed in more detail was the applicant's mention of the use of traditional historic glazing and window frames at the commercial storefronts. Contemporary aluminum storefronts could be appropriate given the way the applicant has rendered them in the perspective view. To be reviewed as more detail is provided on materials.
PB.3	5.31.2023*	Site materials/paving of the emergency vehicle access proposed to exit onto Alden Street.
	6.15.2023	See section 1-I.1 (Site Sustainability) above.
PB.4	5.31.2023*	Landscaping including pocket parks and public spaces
	6.15.2023	See section G and K, above.
PB.5	5.31.2023*	Signage
	6.15.2023	See 1-A.2 and 1-E.1 for comments on commercial entrance locations. See section M above for our future discussion of overall building signage that was not discussed as it was not explicitly proposed by the applicant.
PB.6	5.31.2023*	Relationship to the train station across the street

	6.15.2023	See 1-F.2 above.
PB.7	5.31.2023*	Sustainability details (see the new best practices document)
	6.15.2023	See section I above. We must review this comprehensively in our next meeting once building form and updated plans are provided.
PB.8	5.31.2023*	Protection needed (if any) for pedestrian/bicycle safety.
	6.15.2023	See section J above. We have concerns about the cross circulation of pedestrians, resident vehicles, commercial patron vehicles and delivery trucks given there is no loading dock. No solution was found during this meeting but an issue exists that must be resolved.