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December 17, 2025

Zoning Board of Appeals
888 Worcester Street, Suite 160
Wellesley, MA 02482
Attn: Lenore Mahoney, Executive Secretary

Re: 49 Walnut Street Multifamily Residential Project PSI

Dear Zoning Board of Appeals Members,

On September 10, 2025, Boston Real Estate Capital (the “Applicant”) submitted an application to the Design Review Board (the “Board”) for Major Construction in conjunction with a Project of Significant Impact at 49 Walnut Street for the construction of a multi-story, 28-unit, multifamily condominium of 65,733 sq. ft. on the west side of Walnut Street abutting the Charles River and Massachusetts Department of Conservation & Recreation (DCR) land.

The Board considered the project at its meetings on September 17, October 8, and November 19, 2025. Following the initial presentation on September 17, the Board raised several concerns regarding the project’s siting within the floodplain; the adequacy of flood protection measures for the garage, habitable spaces, and machinery and utility equipment; safety and public access along the waterfront; building design and massing; and landscaping elements. For the October 8 meeting, the Applicant presented revised plans intended to address the Board’s comments. Following the Applicant’s presentation, the Board raised similar concerns about safety and public access along the waterfront, building design and massing, and landscaping, and brought forth new questions regarding sound mitigation for mechanical equipment, generator locations, roofscape elements, views from neighboring streets and properties, and sustainability features of the building.

For the November 19 meeting, the Applicant again presented updated plans to the Board. Following extensive discussion and comments from members of the public, the Design Review Board voted unanimously to accept the application as presented with the strong suggestion that this project come back to the Board at a later stage in the permitting process when the design is less schematic.

The Board’s review and evaluation of the proposed project are grounded in the explicit objectives and criteria set forth in Section 5.5 of the Zoning Bylaw, and in the principles articulated in the Design Guidelines Handbook. The comments and recommendations provided by the Board are not discretionary or preference-based, but reflect the application of these adopted standards to the specifics of the proposal. The Board’s recommendations, as articulated through the formal motion and meeting discussions, are organized below by topic area:

Affordability and Sustainability

- The six affordable units should be evenly distributed throughout the building and out of the flood zone.
- It is positive that the project is pursuing Passive House design.

Building Design

- Adjust the banding on the ground floor to improve the proportions and make the ground floor look taller.
- Per the Design Guidelines, exposed foundation walls should be minimized.
- Restudy the massing of the building to expand the green space separating the building from the river/wetland on its three sides to support a more robust planting buffer and an improved pedestrian walkway.
- Put forth a stronger effort to break down the mass and monotony of the back of the building by studying the materiality, massing, and color to satisfy neighbor concerns.
- Reposition the penthouse decks to better screen mechanical equipment.
- Address the noise and light pollution from HVAC and rooftop decks by adding physical barriers instead of relying on planter beds that may not be maintained by residents. The architect acknowledged that a soundproof screen wall will be used for the rooftop equipment.
- Create design cohesion between the stair towers, sound walls, and mechanical screening through consistent materials and colors for a more animated roofscape.
- Provide a digital study model to demonstrate the scale and relationship to the surrounding buildings and environment.

Landscaping

- Ensure that the guardrail design for the riverwalk and outdoor patio complements and reflects the surrounding architectural and neighborhood character.
- Incorporate shoreline protection and stabilization measures to prevent erosion, enhance habitat, and maintain the natural character of the existing riverbank.
- Consistent with the Section 5.5 Design Criterion to preserve and enhance the natural landscape, ensure that existing old-growth trees are protected and that the natural topography is altered as minimally as possible
- Create a naturalized landscape around the property to blend better with adjacent natural settings using native, long-lived, low-maintenance plantings.
- Enhance the pedestrian experience along the riverwalk by creating a meandering path within the natural landscape and incorporating Dark Sky compliant lighting for safety.
- Enhance the plantings on the roof and on the blank garage wall facing the river to create visual interest and help screen the building.
- Minimize paved surfaces as much as is feasible.

Vehicular and Pedestrian Access

- Though vehicular and pedestrian circulation is not under the purview of the Board for this particular project, comments from members of the public and the Board regarding vehicular and pedestrian access, safety, and connection to surrounding neighborhoods are still design issues and should be thoroughly addressed in order to make this a successful project.

- Consider one-way circulation to address the issue of the narrow roadways that do not provide adequate space to accommodate both safe pedestrian walkways and two-way traffic lanes.
- Collaborate with DCR and surrounding property owners to secure the necessary easements to create strong and safe pedestrian connections between the subject property, Walnut Street, the Hunnewell Fyffe Footbridge, and adjacent parkland.
- Chapter 91 requires public access to the riverfront. Ensure that pedestrian access along the riverfront is safe, accessible, and enjoyable.

The Board strongly wishes to stay involved in this project as it advances, and trusts that the ZBA will remain committed to thoughtful collaboration with the Design Review Board, Planning Board and Staff, DCR, and other Town entities. The Board respectfully requests that their recommendations be taken into consideration as conditions for Site Plan Approval and for any additional decisions that may arise as the review and permitting processes move forward.

Please contact me with any questions or if you need anything further.

Sincerely,



Alannah Rivera, Planner

On Behalf of the Design Review Board

*Cc: Michael Grant, Inspector of Buildings/Zoning Enforcement Officer
Brandon Schmitt, Natural Resources Commission Director*