



## CITY OF MELROSE

## OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

JENNIFER GRIGORAITIS

*Mayor*

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February 5, 2024

Mr. Michael Busby, Relationship Manager  
Mass Housing  
One Beacon Street  
Boston, MA 02108

RE: Site Approval for 164 Essex Street, Melrose, MA, MH ID No. 1217

Dear Mr. Busby:

Thank you for providing us with the opportunity to respond to the request for Site Approval for a 40B development for 164 Essex Street submitted by Sean and Laura Szekely of Cedar Park Development LLC. Our understanding is that the proposal is to construct a 76-unit multifamily structure. The proposal includes four studio units, forty-nine one-bedroom units, fifteen two-bedroom units, and eight three-bedroom units. Nineteen of the units (25%) will be affordable to households earning at or below 80% AMI and the remainder would be market rate. The residential units are proposed as rental units and all 76 would count on the City's Subsidized Housing Inventory upon acceptance by DHCD.

The project site is located in the Melrose Cedar Park neighborhood and is in the Extensive Business District (BB-1) and the Rail Corridor Overlay District (RCOD). The RCOD allows multifamily residential by right. The uses in the vicinity are a mix of multifamily and single-family dwellings, a senior living facility, and commercial properties. The railroad tracks for the commuter rail line run directly behind the property. Melrose Cedar Park Commuter Rail Station and the Cedar Park business district are located 0.1 miles away, and Downtown Melrose is located about 0.3 miles away from the property.

This proposal seeks to redevelop an underutilized parking lot into a transit-oriented multifamily development in line with the City and the State's housing production goals. The property was identified as an opportunity site in the City's Housing Production Plan due to its proximity to public transportation and commercial amenities and is ideal for residential development. Melrose lacks available buildable land, so this type of infill development is highly encouraged. We are eager to see this property repurposed, and we strongly believe that this project will positively impact the community while making an important contribution to the local and regional housing stock.

We appreciate that this proposed development adheres to the intent of the RCOD and maximizes the available lot area to provide a housing mix that is expected to attract a

diverse population of multigenerational residents. The proposed design and materials fit within the existing fabric of the neighborhood and the variety of architectural details help break up the building's massing and activate the streetscape. Residential amenities, such as the roof deck and private balconies, will provide tenants with open space on this urban block and the proposed landscaping will provide pervious surfaces where there currently are none.

The City supports the parking ratio, which is common among many of the multifamily buildings in Melrose, and feels that the design successfully shields the proposed parking to offer a pedestrian friendly experience. The plans also show plenty of covered bicycle parking to make multimodal travel for residents of the building possible. A rigorous transportation demand management plan to reduce the need for tenants to bring cars to this transit rich location will be important.

The addition of 76 units to the City's housing stock, including nineteen affordable units, is an extremely valuable contribution to our critically low supply. My administration is committed to addressing the issues of affordability in a time of excessive housing costs in Melrose and the region and continuing the City's decades' long focus on smart growth and transit-oriented development as documented in the *Melrose Forward* Master Plan, the Melrose Housing Production Plan, and our participation in the Metropolitan Mayors Coalition Regional Housing Task Force. We also recognize the positive fiscal impacts of this development and welcome the economic activity that the addition of 76 residential units will bring to our many small, local businesses.

My administration looks forward to the local review of this project through the comprehensive permitting process. City Staff will ensure that the Zoning Board of Appeals has the support that they need to fully review this application.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments and to express support for the issuance of a Project Eligibility Letter to allow this proposal to proceed to the next phase of permitting. Do not hesitate to reach out to me or the Director of Planning and Community Development, Denise Gaffey, if we can provide further assistance at this time.

Very Truly Yours,



Jennifer Grigoraitis  
Mayor

cc: Councilor Cal Finocchiaro, Ward Six City Councilor  
Curtis Dooling, Acting Chair, Zoning Board of Appeals  
Denise Gaffey, OPCD Director & City Planner  
Lori Massa, Senior Planner  
Maya Noviski, Assistant Planner