

A Review of the Application to
Remove the Crossbar Framing the Parking Area
183 Comm Ave and Public Alley 425

BBAC Public Hearing
Case 18 369 BB

December 13, 2017

BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

The enclosed parking area is framed by a crossbar that frames the entrance facing Public Alley 425.



Photo below looks south across Public Alley 425 to the rear of 183 Comm Ave.

The crossbar is 7 feet high and prevents boom lift and other trucks from entering the parking area.

This limitation complicates servicing the rear facade, servicing the roof of the building and accepting deliveries.

Removing the cross bar has various benefits that accrue to all residents, both directly and indirectly.

AERIAL VIEW OF THE PARKING AREA

The brick wall separating the 183 and 191 parking areas (pictured) is 7 feet 8 inches high and 18 feet 6 inches long.

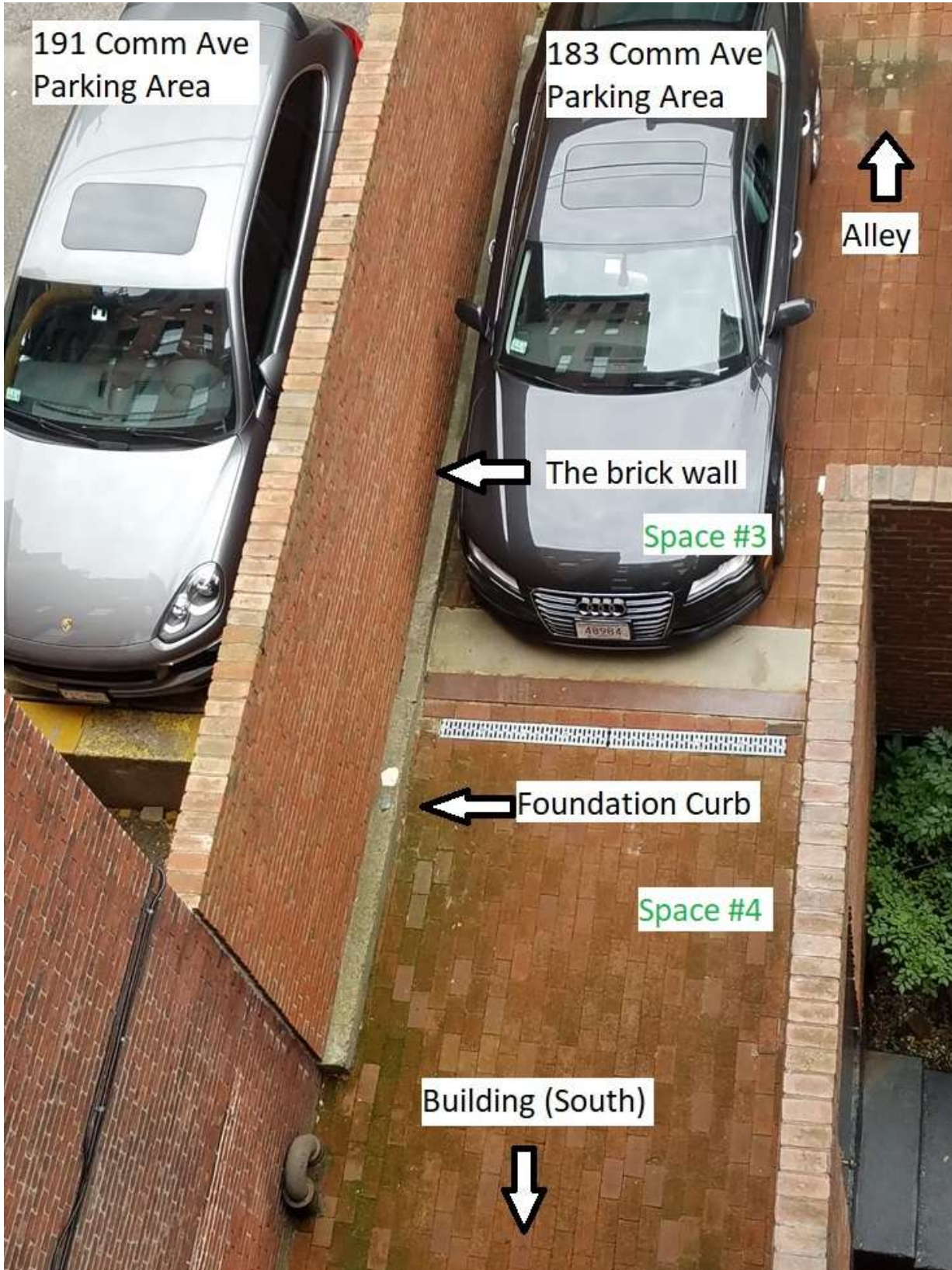


Photo taken from 183 Comm Ave. Public Alley 425 is at the top (north) and 183 Comm Ave is at the bottom (south).

THE 183 PARKING AREA IS FLAT AND AT THE BASEMENT LEVEL

The 183 Comm parking area is comparatively flat.

The window above the black door belongs to Unit 2 which is considered the ground level of 183 Comm Ave.



This photograph is taken while standing in Public Alley 425 looking at the rear of 183 Comm Ave.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Our application to remove the crossbar requires no zoning variance.

Our application was considered for administrative approval at the October 11, 2017 public hearing (an indication that the proposal is not troublesome).

Our application has the support of the majority of the residents of our small, 5-unit building.

Our application is made after several meetings with Rob Chiccarelli, the building's mason to ensure all technical issues were considered.

Removing the side walls is not feasible and cannot be considered.

NB: *Mr. Chiccarelli has met with trustees on several occasions to discuss the feasibility of the project and submitted a letter dated October 30th at the request of the BBAC.*

MASON'S RECOMMENDATION

Rob Chiccarelli recommends that the concrete footers that separate the 183 parking area from its neighbors on either side not be disturbed or altered in anyway.

These concrete footers are structural and compensate for the height difference between the 183 parking area and the parking area on either side (the 183 Comm parking area is as much as a foot lower than its neighbors).

Removal of these footers would result in settling as the height difference of the parking areas would equalize.

Both the strength and weight of the side walls buttress and help immobilize the footers. The mason advises that as much of the side walls remain in order to disturb as little as possible the footers.

The height of the side walls can and should be lowered to ensure their stability after the crossbar is removed.

The mason advises that the height of two side walls be lowered by approximately 1/3 by removing 14 rows of bricks (this would lower the height of the wall from just under 8 feet to just over 5½ feet).

This will ensure that the walls will not "topple over" after the crossbar's reinforcement has been removed.

PHOTO SHOWING HOW THE HEIGHT OF THE SIDE WALL WOULD BE LOWERED

The horizontal white line in the photograph below shows the height of the wall between 183 and 191 parking areas if 14 rows of bricks are removed.

At the request of the BBAC, a course of blue stone 2 inches thick would be added on top to finish the brick wall.

The height of the wall including the blue stone cap would be 67 inches or just over 5½ feet.



This picture is taken while standing in Public Alley 425 facing east. In the foreground is the parking area of 191 Comm Ave. In the back half of the photo is the parking area of 183 Comm Ave. Beyond that is the 181 Comm Ave parking area.

NB: The photograph also provides perspective on the height difference between the two parking areas. The height difference necessitates the concrete footer that the mason does not want disturbed or compromised.

THE FOOTER SERVES A STRUCTURAL PURPOSE AND SHOULD NOT BE TAMPERED WITH

The footer runs the length of parking area. It is part of the foundation between the 2 buildings.

The footer ties into a retaining wall in the 191 parking area and to the corner of their building (see photo on page 13).

The footer is necessary due to 191 Comm Ave parking area being meaningfully (almost a foot) higher than that of 183 Comm Ave, as can be seen in the photograph below.



This photograph is taken while standing in Public Alley 425. On the left is the 183 Comm Ave parking, on the right is 191 Comm Ave.

The mason believes that footer extends below the frost line (and the frost is considered to be 4 feet below the ground).

Removing the foundation wall could result in settling issues that would affect 183 Comm Ave and the neighboring buildings.

ANOTHER VIEW OF THE HEIGHT DIFFERENCE

The car parked in 191 Comm Ave parking area is appreciably higher than the car in 183 Comm Ave parking area because of the different height in the grade of the two parking areas.

The weight of cars, SUVs and trucks that park in the area add stress and pressure. The footer is a critical component in compensating for the height differential, especially when there is a heavy vehicle parked.



Photo taken from the alley looking at the 183 and 191 Comm parking areas.

THE FOOTER IS CLOSE TO A FOOT HIGHER THAN THE PARKING LEVEL ON THE 183 SIDE

The footer ranges in height from front to back but is more than 9 inches taller than 183 parking area.

Note that the 183 parking area is relatively level (flat). The 191 parking area has an upward slope (shown later).



This photograph is taken while standing in the 183 Comm Ave parking area facing the brick wall that separates the 183 and 191 parking areas.

THE FOOTER IS WIDER THAN THE BRICK WALL

The footer extends 4.75 inches beyond the brick wall.

The footer acts like a curb and serves as a "guard rail".

This thick, concrete curb is almost a foot tall so it determines the side of the parking space, not the brick wall.

If a car is parked 2 bricks from the curb in space #3, that leaves a distance of some 14 inches between the car and the wall.

A reasonable and not atypical clearance given tight parking conditions in Back Bay.

Even if it were possible, removing the wall will not change the size of the parking space #3.



This photo was taken standing in the 183 Comm Ave parking area to measure the setback of the brick wall from the foundation curb.

NB: The size of space #3 is determined by the concrete curb almost a foot tall that sticks out into the parking space by almost 5 inches, not by the brick wall.

191 PARKING AREA IS NOT LEVEL - IT SLOPES DOWNWARD TOWARDS THE ALLEY

The parking area for 191 Comm Avenue is not level.

It is at a meaningfully higher grade than 183 Comm (ranging from 0 at the alley to 10 inches at the right hand side of the parking space in the photo below).

The parking area has an upward slope (pictured left the alley upwards to the right towards the building). The slope rises more than 10 inches over 24 feet.



This photograph was taken standing in the 191 parking area looking east towards the 183 parking area.

The footer can be seen painted yellow and serves as a retaining wall and is part of the foundation.

Note in the photo at right that the footer ties into a retaining wall that separates the basement of 191 from the parking area. The next page provides a photo of the retraining wall and where the footer connects with 191.

The mason believes that both the weight and the strength of brick wall reinforces and assists in the effectiveness of the foundation retaining wall that holds back the higher grade of the 191 parking area both from the 183 parking area and the retaining wall at the rear of 191 Comm parking area.

The mason advises retaining as much of the brick wall as possible so as to disturb the equilibrium of the footer as little as possible.

THE FOOTER IS A STRUCTURAL COMPONENT

The picture below supports the mason's instincts that the footer extends below the frost line. The snow shovel stands 54 inches tall.

The footer also appears to tie in to the retaining wall that is a part of the 191 parking area and the corner of 191 Comm Ave.

Without the original foundation drawings, it is difficult to know how these structural elements interact.



Picture is taking behind 191 Comm Ave facing the wall that blocks the 183 Comm parking area

SHORTENING THE WALL WAS CONSIDERED

Shortening the horizontal length of the wall was discussed with the mason but is not advised.

We asked about shortening the wall 3 to 5 feet. Rob Chiccarelli has reservations because:

- Changing the length of the wall risks upsetting the balance of the weight on the footer. Releasing the weight unevenly that currently sits on the on the footer could cause it to "tilt" or otherwise shift.
- Shortening the wall increases greatly the complexity of the masonry work in order to properly "finish" the new end of the shortened wall (see notes at bottom of page).

If the end of the wall is not finished, it will be unsightly and will be prone to introducing moisture in to the rest of the wall.

The work can be done but the principal reason not to shorten the wall is the risk of de-stabilizing the footer and causing other problems stemming from the height differential of the two parking areas.

Every precaution must be taken to not encourage settling in the foundation of 183 Comm, or any of the neighboring buildings.

NB: It is not clear what is accomplished by shortening the wall since the brick wall is not the constraint to parking space #3, the cement footer is (as discussed on [page 11](#) above) and the footer should not be touched.

Shortening the wall would not address the inherent limitations of parking space #3 but it would greatly increase the probability of other structural issues.

What is involved in finishing the end of a brick wall

To properly finish the end, bricks must be cut precisely, mortar must be dug out and new bricks and mortar that match existing then need to be interwoven into the existing wall.

This requires craft and greatly increases mason time and the waste material which must be disposed of.

It would increase the cost of the project half to two thirds.

SUMMARY

Disturbing the equilibrium that has separated and maintained the height differential between the 183 parking areas and that of its neighbors is risky and strongly discouraged by Rob Chiccarelli who has visited the site several times and knows our building.

Rob's advice- remove only 14 rows of bricks when reducing the height of the wall and otherwise do not impair the structural integrity of the retaining wall structure that is interconnected with our building, and those at 181 and 191 Comm Ave.

All precautions must be taken to avoid a cascade of issues or a "domino effect" when altering structural components that have been in place for at least 3 decades.

The proposal we filed with the BBAC requires no zoning variances.

A majority of residents of 183 Comm are in favor of the proposal as filed.

The objection raised by the resident of our building is questionable since the project does not alter or effect his parking space. He is not harmed or worse off by the removal of the crossbar. It seems that he lacks standing.

There are minimal risks in pursuing the project as proposed.

There are maintenance, service and economic reasons to remove the crossbar.

The trustees respectfully request that the application which was considered for administrative approval at the October 11th hearing now be approved.