



SCUP/AIA-CAE Excellence in Planning for a District, or Campus Component, Honor Award

Riverside Housing Initiative at Harvard University in Cambridge, MA
and Elkus Manfredi Architects in Boston, MA



Photo by Robert Benson



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The Riverside Housing initiative is designed to substantially increase the available graduate student housing in Cambridge. The completed plan will provide a range of apartment types for graduate students, faculty, university affiliates, and the community (in affordable housing) on several sites in proximity to the Charles River.

“The new building sites, which had previously been a series of disjointed parking lots, comprise a unique urban design opportunity to reinforce the residential character of the neighborhoods through careful infill and building relocation,” says Steven C. Nason, from Harvard Real Estate Services.

These distinct sites, assembled from parcels of existing surface parking, represented an unattractive and unsafe edge to the direct abutters in this residential neighborhood. Working with the neighborhood, the plan developed two building types: a larger six-story building appropriate to the context of the existing River Houses and a series of “triple deckers” in the typology of the surrounding neighborhood. The community endorsed this street infill approach, described as “filling in the missing teeth.”

Public benefits also include a new public park and affordable community housing, which is a first for Harvard.

The central element of the resulting project is a new six story residential hall, the Graduate Commons, with 141 apartments (201 beds). In addition, 190 parking spaces and bicycle storage are located on three levels below grade.

The second site was infilled with seven new two-family and three-family wood frame buildings with a planted hardscape parking court. On the third site facing the Charles River, three larger wood frame buildings face a new public park. These buildings vary in their orientation on new and existing streets and provide a finished edge to the neighborhood and security for the park.

The eleven wood frame buildings have their own subtle variation on material, color, and fenestration, fitting within the architectural diversity of the neighborhood. In combination with relocated existing buildings, these wood frames fill in the empty spaces between existing rows.

The facades of the Graduate Commons are clad in brick, copper, limestone, and granite, a palette that has been calibrated and detailed to harmonize with the River House heritage. Subtle rhythms of texture, shadow, and proportion convey permanence; glass and metal clad projecting bays and other articulation of the building mass break down the building volume; and a sense of permeability and liveliness contribute to the pedestrian experience of the neighborhood.

The jury said, “This project is a model for planning how campuses look at their edges and revive their connection to the surrounding community.”

Project Team: *Harvard University with Elkus Manfredi Architects* and Harvard Real Estate Services, Jones Lang LaSalle, Halvorson Design Partnership, McNamara/Salvia, Inc. and AHA Consulting Engineers.

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339 E. Liberty, Suite 300 | Ann Arbor, MI 48104 | phone: 734.998.7832 | fax: 734.998.6532 | email: info@scup.org

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