

Originally published by [The Architect's Newspaper](#)

MASS Design Group and The Architectural Team to design combined housing and library project in Boston's West End

By [Daniel Jonas Roche](#) • January 28, 2025



The building elevation will feature brick frames and vertical piers that create depth thanks to corbelling and bonding patterns. (Courtesy City of Boston)

Propositions for combining residential and cultural uses atop publicly owned land are gaining traction, as the national [housing crisis](#) worsens. Last November, Fogarty Finger and Andrew Berman Architect delivered [The Eliza](#)—174 affordable apartments which sit above a New York Public Library branch in Inwood, Manhattan. And now, a similar scheme is underway in [Boston](#).

An [affordable housing-plus-library](#) proposal by [MASS Design Group](#) and The Architectural Team ([TAT](#)) was recently selected for construction in Boston's West End neighborhood, city officials [shared](#).

The plan will replace an existing, midcentury, single-story library at 151 Cambridge Street with a new 12-story residential building. A new 2-story public library will be located at the building's grade level, a replacement of the existing library.



The building is set in a historic Boston neighborhood, not far from Downtown Boston and Beacon Hill. (Courtesy City of Boston)

“The design celebrates the community programming throughout the building,” MASS Design Group said in its submittal to the city of Boston. “Community spaces and outdoor zones are treated as subtle exceptions for the organizing architectural language of the rest of the building.”

How’d We Get Here?

MASS Design Group beat out stiff competition for the job. The city [first shared its intent](#) of replacing the library in 2020. Then, in 2021, a programming study was completed by Ann Beha Architects (now [Annum Architects](#)), the Mayor’s office, Boston Public Library (BPL), the Public Facilities Department, and the Department of Neighborhood Development.

An RFP went out in 2023 for the commission and a number of architects threw their names in the hat. The shortlisted firms were announced in 2023; they were [MASS Design Group](#); [Davis Square Architects](#); [Stull & Lee](#) and John Ronan Architects; [The Architectural Team](#); [Pennrose](#), [DiMella Shaffer](#), and [Mikyoun Kim Design](#); and The Community Builders and JGE Development.

Ultimately MASS Design Group and The Architectural Team came out on top. The forthcoming building will top out at 176,000 square feet. It will contain 119 units of affordable housing; each of these flats will be reserved for households that earn below 80 percent of the Area Median Income. The 2-story library beneath the homes will be 19,000 square feet.



An axon view of the project showing its urban context. (Courtesy City of Boston)

Renderings, shared in the [Project Notification Form submission](#), show a stately but contemporary building well suited for Boston’s historic core. The choice to use brick was, indeed, a strategic and contextual one, MASS Design Group shared.

“Brick is prominently used here throughout as a timeless material with the richness, warmth and texture that is linked to the context, but here it is deployed in a manner that is confidently contemporary and of its time,” MASS Design Group said.



The area across from Otis House will have a plaza lined with trees and benches. (Courtesy City of Boston)

The elevation will feature brick frames and vertical piers that create depth thanks to corbelling and bonding patterns, the architects elaborated. This brick framework is meant to organize the facade, which becomes visually and physically heavier closer to the sidewalk level, a Richardsonian motif.

Panels adorn select parts of the facade which are meant to evoke the historic windows of nearby Beacon Hill, namely their shutters.



The library and housing replace an existing library from the 1970s. (Courtesy City of Boston)

As for the library, that space will sit adjacent to Otis House, a historic residential estate. Trees and walkways will line that portion of the site to create a rich and inviting connection to the library, faced with generously sized window walls.

The building is slated for completion in 2027.