

**River Road Study Committee  
Architecture Subcommittee  
February 25, 2016**



**MEETING NOTES**

**Committee Members**  
Select Chair Ben Franco  
Dick Benka  
Alan Christ  
Chris Dempsey  
Steve Heikin  
Brian Hochleutner  
Yvette Johnson  
Ken Lewis  
Wendy Machmuller  
Hugh Mattison  
Tom Nally  
Marilyn Newman  
Mariah Nobrega  
Charles Osborne  
Linda Pehlke  
Bill Reyelt  
Daniel Weingart

*Subcommittee Members Present:* Ben Franco, Steve Heikin, Tom Nally, Alan Christ, Wendy Machmuller

*Subcommittee Members Absent:* Charles Osborne

*Guests:* Betsy Dewitt, Hugh Mattison

*Materials:* Agenda, I-district zoning map and sketch paper

*Committee members met from 7:00 to 8:45 pm*

**1. Review Committee Framework**

- Andy Martineau opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and by stating that the work by this subcommittee will be an iterative process; testing the uses put forward by the zoning committee with additional analysis provided by the finance subcommittee. ]
- Andy also stated that River Road is park land that is likely has article 97 protections, which has implications for what can and cannot be done on the land.

**2. Discussion of Site and Area Existing Conditions**

- Andy Martineau stated that one of the goals for the evening is to begin establishing some basic parameters for how the district should function in terms of massing, circulation and connectivity with the surrounding area.

*Questions Comments:*

- The committee will need to consider the impact proposed uses will have on trip generation and mode split
- There is an opportunity for buildings to have two sides with one side opening to the park
- Two front doors is not always ideal, but could work in this instance
- There is a range of possibilities to create pedestrian access through the site
- "Porosity, transparency, and articulation are some of the guidelines this committee should seek to employ
- The proposed hotel does not seem like a gateway building to me
- The location is a defining corner for the district and surrounding area. A taller more prominent structure may be appropriate
- Is there a possibility of having one large building?

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- Claremont has reached out to all of the other property owners in the district. We should not base our decisions around the potential for them to acquire additional property because there is a lot of unknowns
- If the building becomes one strip, than we would create an urban canyon which is one of scenarios the full committee stated they wanted to avoid
- To the extent possible, the massing should relate to Village Way
- Parking is a challenge on this site and in the district. The floorplates in the rest of the district are narrow, which makes ramping inefficient.
- We worked on a project many years ago to rezone the Fenway, which included residential units with a parking ratio of .75 spaces per unit supplemented by ZipCar. That was sort of unprecedented at the time. There could be an opportunity to reduce parking along the same lines here
- Ground floor retail is something that the committee has stated would be ideal. Depending on the type, some curb-side parking will be necessary. The zoning could incentivize ground floor retail limiting the first floor presence, which would push the business to utilize upper levels for office and storage. We did something similar to this in another community
- The Committee needs to continue to push for uses that generate revenue
- 60' floor plates are almost ideal for LEED certifiable general office space
- Non-residential uses here may make better use of the limited parcel depth
- When considering certain uses, this committee will also need to be mindful of site circulation and traffic with respect to deliveries
- There could be a loading zone on River Road

**3. Discussion of Next Steps for Further Site Analysis**

- The committee sketched out some preliminary ideas related to lot sizes, setbacks and pedestrian circulation to further explored by the full committee and vetted for feasibility by the finance subcommittee.

*Questions/Comments:*

- Since there is a town sewer easement going through the middle of the district, there could be an opportunity to establish side-yard setbacks that make it possible to create a useful public space on the easement that aligns with Pearl St. across Brookline Ave.
- The sky plane zoning concept could be used to minimize height impacts across the length of the district
- Taller buildings could also create an opportunity to screen village way and other residents from Route 9
- The sky plane zoning worked at the Red Cab site
- The sky plan worked, but it also minimized setbacks on Route 9
- Could the scale or height be reduced on the Brookline Ave side?
- Setbacks create an opportunity for a more dynamic streetscape, wider sidewalks etc.
- Setbacks that allow for the creation of some public space could be a factor for density bonuses that create taller buildings

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- Height does not have to be the enemy. There was a rezoning effort in Dorchester Ave where people were at first reluctant to allow for additional height, but eventually they understood that height can allow for things like useable public spaces, wider sidewalks etc. There are tradeoffs and it is important to understand them. That rezoning effort provided for FAR bonuses up to 7.0.
- Having setbacks also creates the opportunity to have four-sided buildings instead of two-sided, which may be more desirable.
- Could we create a way to duplicate the highline park in NYC?
- This is not the most active area because there are no destinations or big attractions. If you reduce the density even further, you also reduce the density of activity
- Rounded or inset corners may help soften buildings

Next Steps:

- Andy to obtain baseline Sketchup model from Stantec for the committee to begin testing different massing scenarios.
- Alan to begin modeling two different height scenarios based on some of the uses put forward by the zoning subcommittee
- Andy to seek out examples of similar blocks/districts that have been up zoned resulting in the creation usable public spaces, connectivity