



## River Road Study Committee April 14, 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

*Committee Members Present:* Ben Franco, Dick Benka, Alan Christ, Brian Hochleutner, Yvette Johnson, Ken Lewis, Wendy Machmuller, Hugh Mattison, Tom Nally, Marilyn Newman, Mariah Nobrega, Linda Olson Pehlke, Charles Osborne,

*Committee Members Absent:* Chris Dempsey, Bill Reyelt, Steve Heikin

*Staff:* Andy Martineau

*Guests:* Several residents were present

*Committee members met from 7:00 to 9:15 pm*

*Materials:*, draft minutes, massing scenario handout, excerpts from preliminary pro forma and building program PowerPoint

Ben Franco opened the meeting by outlining the goals for the evening, including hearing from Pam McKinney, the financial consultant recently hired by the town to provide additional analysis of the preliminary redevelopment scenarios being considered by the Committee. Ben stated that the Committee will need to decide on specific uses for Pam to perform her analysis, which she will report on in a few weeks.

Town Clerk, Patrick Ward officially swore in the Committee members.

#### 1. Review and Approve Meeting Minutes

- Minutes from 2/26/16, 3/2/16 and 4/6/16 were approved as amended.

#### 2. Discussion with Pam McKinney, Financial Consultant for the Committee, regarding beginning a financial study of various redevelopment scenarios.

- Andy Martineau reviewed the Committee's work to date noting that several massing envelopes have been considered, however, the parking geometry is very challenging given the narrow parcels.
- The Committee voted at their last meeting on a preliminary massing envelope (Scenario 2A) for Pam to use as a starting point for her preliminary analysis work.
- Andy stated that Pam's analysis will ground the Committee's proposed scenarios and assumptions about what might be feasible in market and financial reality.

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#### *Pam McKinney Overview:*

- Pam discussed a number of her preliminary observations about the district and its redevelopment potential, including the uses and the massing envelope the Committee is exploring.
- Pam noted that the lots are “skinny” and that parcel assembly will be key for facilitating redevelopment.
- Pam observed that there are several revenue producing uses currently occupying each of the parcels, so there needs to be enough incentive created through zoning for a land owner to want to sell a property and so there is enough redevelopment potential that someone would want to demolish the existing uses and replace them with something else.
- It is surprising how much density is required to incentivize the redevelopment of a building/property that is already generating revenue.
- The land alone must be more valuable than the use/building that is existing.
- The Committee will need to decide what is acceptable in terms of height and massing as it relates to the financial and market feasibility of a project. (e.g. will the zoning be enough to facilitate redevelopment?)
- The linear nature of the district and skinny lots is conducive to hotel and residential uses because the floor plate configurations are more flexible than office or retail.
- Office uses typically want to be more square and uniform with office and common areas built around core circulation, (elevators, stairs etc.) which allows perimeter spaces to have windows..
- Just because a lot is half the size required for a typical office floor plate, does not mean you can just build half as much office space. You still need to build the core and common areas.
- Office could work in this location if it were built to suit a specific tenant.
- It is not likely a developer would build office here on speculation.
- From a market perspective, a hotel on this site is a no brainer with the right parameters to satisfy demand (rooms, amenities, parking). A parking ratio of .3 to .4 spaces per room would be adequate at this site.
- An age restricted development could work in this area. Something that is not uber luxury and amortizes amenities.
- It will be important to understand the relationship between an age restricted development and a hotel, with possible shared amenities, like the Cleveland Circle development.
- The new building in Boston at the corner of Longwood Ave is an example of micro units being developed in the area.
- Micro units strike a balance between high rents on a per sf basis that are still affordable for many willing to live with a smaller footprint.
- Both age restricted residential and/or micro units are more feasible here because of a lower parking requirement than general office typically has.

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- A parking ratio of .5 - .75 is typical small or age restricted units.
- FAR does not matter, and often gives unpredictable results. My firm worked on rezoning a portion of Dorchester Ave where we worked with the community to decide how much height and massing and lot coverage was acceptable. We established an envelope that allowed for greater density in exchange for requirements for open space and uses.

#### *Questions/Comments from the Committee:*

- The MIT study recommended reducing or eliminating parking requirements.
- The future Brookline Place garage could help address some of the parking constraints here.
- The entire island is in a Town-defined flood inundation zone.
- The Brookline Place project is on hold and it is difficult to require that parking be located in a place that may not be operational for another two years .
- Having parking located across the street is a tool “safety valve” that could be utilized in the future to alleviate parking issues that may arise from future developments
- No developer wants to build more parking than they need to. Developers want to build parking that enables them to have a marketable project.
- Consider including parking in FAR
- Could we leave parking up to the market for uses that are not residential?
- It’s an issue of certainty and having no say in parking whether a minimum or maximum would be challenging for a community like Brookline. There would be a debate with every project that is proposed.
- A better approach might be to set a parking maximum and let the developer decide how to use the space most efficiently.
- Retail is finicky for developers because they have to justify the rents and add up the demand for the amount of square feet dedicated to retail. Can those retail uses survive in this location?
- Could we incentivize retail like a convenience store via allowing density bonuses?
- It’s not just about density, retail likes to exist in locations where there are similar uses on both sides of the street, with visible parking that is easily accessible.
- There is a “facilities of public accommodation” analysis which shows how many square feet of retail different uses can support on average:
  - one hotel room can support 100 SF
  - one residential unit can support 50 SF
  - 1K of office space can support 25 SF
- Some retail uses here like a strong restaurant or café and maybe a convenience store could be feasible. Boutique retail is not likely feasible.
- The Brookline Place development will likely generate additional day time foot traffic.
- What about Vertex in Boston where the developer takes a loss on retail uses?
- The metrics used in the analysis do not consider destination

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- The point here is that you should not assume that all of the ground floor space will be retail. There could be some retail, but it should be oriented towards the hotel and other commercial buildings.
- Retail is likely a secondary amenity for likely development in this area.
- You likely do not want to require retail, but offer incentives for the types of retail you want.
- It would be great to have setbacks here, but we need to understand the impact those have of project feasibility.
- The preliminary financial analysis assumes 2/3 of the ground floor space would be available for rent which equals about 16K SF, which is about how much retail could potentially be supported by the uses we are exploring.
- Is it possible to incentivize uses that are affordable for the surrounding neighborhood, like a Lamberts or Tedeschi?
- It was noted that the island is adjacent to the Muddy River parkland and that a new ped/bike crossing is being built just to the East of the area, which should be viewed as an amenity.
- Examples of residential being built without parking were cited and it was suggested that housing here could be oriented to young professionals working in Longwood which would not require auto ownership.

#### *Discussion of Uses to Be Evaluated by Pam McKinney:*

Pam stated that she would like the Committee to limit the number of uses to five with an allowance for sub-categories (e.g. co working office, live/work office)

**VOTED:** The Committee voted unanimously for Pam McKinney to further analyze the market and financial feasibility of the following uses and to authorize her to evaluate alternative redevelopment scenarios involving assembling the parcels in different configurations.

- Hotel
- Office (general, medical, co-working)
- Residential (micro units, age restricted, live/work space)
- Retail (restaurant/café, convenience store+)

#### *Committee Questions/Comments:*

- When you evaluate the hotel can you also determine if the height and number of parking spaces being proposed are actually what they need?
- I know what each of the hotel flags are generally looking for with respect to the number of keys and parking. Typically, most hotels do not want to go below a parking ratio of .3 to .4 spaces per room.
- Is the footprint for a live/work space different than a traditional office?
- Floor plate requirements can vary if you are building something to suit a specific tenant, where in some cases the efficiency issues are not as big of a deal.

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- Parking on this site is challenging, has the Committee considered building a small garage and wrapping it in retail?
- Another garage could be challenging for town meeting to agree to.
- Will the analysis factor in the percentage of Brookline residents that do not own a car?
- If you set the parking ratio to zero, that does not mean that people are not going to drive to the site.
- How many rooms does a boutique hotel typically have?
- There are lots of models out there. If you base what is allowed to happen here on FAR alone, it is less probable that redevelopment is going to happen.
- What about some of the larger projects in Boston?
- Many of those projects have access to standalone public parking facilities
- Could the hotel build a convenience store?
- Possibly. Some hotels just do not have that in their program.

#### *Public Comment/Questions:*

- Development here could attract Boston residents from Huntington Ave which is also slowly being redeveloped.
- We want to be careful that the businesses here are not competing with the existing businesses in the Village.
- What is occupancy of 10 Brookline Place garage? Can we take advantage of River Road parking in this transit-rich area?
- Why wouldn't a hotel have a full service restaurant? Pam – brand hotel would rather lease space than manage a restaurant.
- This site doesn't lend itself to parking. Developers should want a higher value use. Analysis should include lost tax revenues caused by parking.
- Pam – it's an illusion that development is a short-term effort. This could take 2-4 years. I'll use minimum parking needed for each scenario.
- Don't let parking drive what occupies this area.
- Take advantage of the proximity to transit and the surrounding amenities.
- Do not get hung up on FAR.
- Public benefits will be a fundamental component of any redevelopment project that occurs here.
- The additional analysis should also factor in permitting and environmental mitigation costs.
- If retail is challenging here, the Committee may want to rethink asking for a 20' first floor height.