



River Road Study Committee Architecture Subcommittee April 21, 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, Charles Osborne, Hugh Mattison

Subcommittee Members Absent:

Guests: Betsy Dewitt, Arlene Mattison, Frances Shedd Fisher

Materials: Agenda, discussion points for preliminary design guidelines, Boylston Street design guidelines adopted by the Planning Board in 1994, design guidelines for Davis Path zoning, public space PowerPoint developed by Tom Nally

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

1. Review and Approve Minutes

- Minutes from March 9 were approved as amended.

2. Discussion of design guidelines

- Andy Martineau stated that the Committee is in a unique position of being able to draw on design lessons learned from upcoming and recently completed projects, including the hotel at 111 Boylston Street
- Andy noted that he has received both positive and negative comments about the design of the new hotel at 111 Boylston Street. Andy observed that many of the negative comments revolve around the Boylston Street façade, which some people feel is too imposing in terms of setbacks and large expanse of unbroken mass.
- Andy observed that the full Committee has been discussing some elements of design guidelines with respect to the public realm, primarily in the context of Complete Streets, setbacks, employing the sky plane concept that was used at Red Cab and incorporating flood resilient design.
- Andy stated that he feels it important that the Committee consider taking design guidelines for the overlay district a step further in recognition that the area is an urban edge/gateway to the town in close proximity to the Emerald Necklace and Muddy River.

Subcommittee Questions/Comments:

- We can either be prescriptive or informative about material choices.
- If we are too specific with materials, we may be limiting creative designs.
- The design guidelines could be specific about things like window depth, breaks in the massing, limits on projections, reveals and shadow lines.

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- The Davis Path design guidelines referred to some of those things, perhaps we should include more of them on River Road, without being too prescriptive.
- The Cypress Lofts has some interesting features like rounded corners
- The design of Cypress lofts is more conventional. The River Road area is unique in that it does not have a front and back. It is surrounded on 3 out of 4 sides by public ways so the design of any building should be of equivalent quality on all sides.
- River Road should not be a service entrance. If front yard setbacks are not feasible, then side yard setbacks should be considered to allow for service entrances.
- Consideration of driveway locations should also be factored into the guidelines. Locating all of the parking in one spot is advantageous
- Using the storm water easement as a limited access loading area during off hours is something that has been proposed and could be a good solution given the space limitations of the site. It could function similar to Bennett Street in Harvard Square.
- We could also limit on street loading areas to a certain percentage of a building façade.
- Requiring variations in the façade does not always equate to an attractive design. Part of what makes a building attractive is its ability to attract people and the relationship people have with buildings. The Red Cab façade is more streamlined because that is what it was supposed to be. River Road does not have a sense of place and we have an opportunity to try and change that.
- The easement could be a smaller scale habitat corridor.
- There are opportunities to use things like visual cues (signs, landscape materials public art etc.) to create more of a sense of place.

The subcommittee reviewed the public spaces PowerPoint developed by Tom Nally, which shows small public spaces in Harvard Square, Boston and Newton that the Committee could draw on for inspiration for the storm water easement.

Subcommittee Questions/Comments:

- *Are there any material constraints that would prevent a developer from building a cantilevered structure over the sidewalk or public space?*
- *There are no constraints, the design would have to be done in such a way to support the cantilever*
- *Keep in mind that Developers built much of Harvard Square when the MBTA was coming through, that was a long time ago and if that development were to happen today it would be of a different scale.*
- *Many of these public spaces work because there is critical mass of people and activity. We are not likely going to see the same critical mass along River Road.*
- *Forbes Plaza is an example of a public space that has few amenities, yet attracts a lot of people at lunch time.*
- *The district should feel more like it is open to the public like the Atlantic Wharf.*
- *The Wharf has public spaces because of mitigation and deed restrictions that were put in place when it was being redeveloped. It was formally tide lands.*
- *To the extent possible/practicable, we want to encourage uses to spill onto the sidewalk.*
- *The Marriott in Coolidge Corner is an example of a great public space that is underutilized because nobody knows it's there. We do not want to duplicate the access issue.*

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- *The question is how much public space we reasonable can ask for. These sites are very constrained*
- *We need to be judicious in what we ask developers to create in the way of onsite public spaces*
- *If public space cannot fit onsite, perhaps a tradeoff is to ask for/require off site enhancements in the immediate area of River Road.*
- *We should also be cognizant of shadows along the park space and River Road*
- *Shadows on River Road would likely only be an issue in the summer time when having some shade might actually be a good thing.*
- *Public benefits might include making River Road one way and an extension/enhancement of the park land.*
- *There could be some kind of shared maintenance agreement between the town and a developer.*
- *The design guidelines should also address issues of security like lighting.*

Public Comments/Questions:

- I like all of the ideas the Committee has discussed tonight and I am exciting to see how it turns out.
- The massing the Committee is exploring is still taller than I would prefer, but some of the design features you have discussed tonight sound appealing.
- Redevelopment here should make the area more of a destination.
- The design of any building especially the hotel should complement the Emerald Necklace
- River Road could become more of a community space/park land than it is currently.
- The Emerald Necklace is a passive park and is not open at night so any afterhours activity would have to take place on the building side of River Road.
- Keep the easement space simple and elegant.
- A Restaurant with a coffee shop and public restroom would attract people.
- Mandate Design Review as part of zoning requirements.