



River Road Study Committee May 4, 2016

DRAFT MEETING NOTES

Committee Members
Select Chair Ben Franco
Dick Benka
Alan Christ
Chris Dempsey
Steve Heikin
Brian Hochleitner
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, Ken Lewis, Wendy Machmuller, Tom Nally, Mariah Nobrega, Linda Olson Pehlke, Bill Reyelt, Steve Heikin, Daniel Weingart

Committee Members Participating Remotely: Hugh Mattison

Committee Members Absent: Chris Dempsey, Brian Hochleitner, Yvette Johnson, Marilyn Newman, Charles Osborne

Staff: Andy Martineau, Alison Steinfeld

Guests: Several residents were present

Committee members met from 8:00 to 10:00 am

Materials: agenda, draft minutes, Claremont powerpoint presentation of revised massing.

Ben Franco opened the meeting by welcoming the Claremont team and reminding the Committee that he and staff have been passing feedback from the Committee on to Claremont for the past several weeks. Claremont is appearing before the Committee today to present a revised massing scheme in response to the Committee feedback on a number of areas including, massing, setbacks, and parking layout.

1. Review and Approve Meeting Minutes

- By roll call vote: The minutes from 4/14/16 were approved as amended.
Voting Yes: Ben Franco, Dick Benka, Alan Christ, Ken Lewis, Wendy Machmuller, Tom Nally, Mariah Nobrega, Linda Olson Pehlke, Bill Reyelt, Hugh Mattison
Abstaining: Steve Heikin

2. Presentation of revised 25 Washington Street Proposal by Claremont Company Development Team.

- Claremont President, Elias Patoucheas stated that his team has been communicating regularly with Andy Martineau on a number of areas the Committee has provided feedback on.
- Elias stated that his firm has hired Cambridge 7 Architects to take a new approach to designing their proposed hotel incorporating the Committee's feedback to the extent possible.
- Project Architect, Marc Rogers provided an overview of some of Cambridge 7's notable projects including the Courtyard Marriott in Coolidge Corner.
- In response to the Committee's feedback on setbacks and sidewalk width, Project Manager, Joe Geller provided an overview of the relationship between

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the parcel lot lines, street curb and the face of the proposed hotel. Joe noted that the Town has a permanent easement at the corner of Brookline Ave and Washington Street that enables road users to more easily make a right turn onto Brookline Ave and also allows for there to be sidewalk along portions of Washington Street.

- Joe Geller stated that because of the easement, setbacks on that corner and along portions of Washington Street are more accurately measured from the curb edge. Joe stated that the first floor of the proposed hotel is setback on all sides allowing for sidewalk widths ranging from 8 – 14’.
- Marc Rogers provided an overview of his firm's approach to designing the building drawing on inspiration from some of Brookline's notable buildings.
- Marc Rogers explained the updated massing and building program which includes:
 - 175 hotel rooms
 - 70 parking spaces on two levels (reduced from three levels)
 - (.40 parking ratio)
 - 153,540 GSF
 - Active ground floor uses on three sides of the building including lobby, bar/lounge, restaurant, café seating
 - 15’ first floor heights reduced from 20’
 - Building height ranging from 110’ to 75’
 - Double floor full glass façade at corner of Washington & Brookline Ave,
 - Parking entrance on Brookline Ave with a proposed exit on River Road
 - The building also includes laundry in house which will reduce service related traffic.
- Marc stated that the massing has been modified substantially by eliminating much of the height and bulk along Brookline Ave and River Road. The bulk of the height of the building is now focused along Washington Street. The building steps down towards Brookline Ave/Village Way and more on the River Road/park side.
- The exterior building massing appears as double floors, which makes the building feel less imposing.
- Joe Geller provided an overview of the site circulation patterns and preliminary traffic study which indicates that 11-12 cars would be entering/existing the hotel during peak hours. Joe stated that having access for cars to exit on to River Road allows for a more efficient parking layout (2 vs. 3 levels of parking). Additionally it eliminates what would be a challenging left turn out of the hotel if the only access to parking was off of Brookline Ave.
- Joe stated that the Claremont team has been discussing opportunities with staff for potentially narrowing River Road by bumping out the curbs and eliminating parking. The road could be narrowed from 30’ to approx. 23’, which creates

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opportunities for additional landscaping and wider sidewalks. Per town engineering, 23' is the minimum width allowable.

Discussion Between Committee and Claremont Team:

- What about making River Road one way?
- *Claremont: We are open to that idea; however, it does potentially make the site circulation more challenging as it would have to be made one way going north toward the LMA. The traffic study indicated that there are approximately 320 peak hour trips going north with fewer than 10 heading south toward Route 9.*
- What is the viability of someone being able to make a left turn out of the hotel onto Brookline Ave?
- *Claremont: It would be very challenging. Cars would have to make a right than a left onto Pearl Street to access Route 9.*
- One solution would be to have River Rd. be two-way until the parking exit, with the remainder being one-way North, like the treatment at the Marriot on Webster.
- If River Road were narrowed, it could help enhance the pedestrian experience. Pervious pavers could be incorporated to give the road a more pedestrian feel and would also help manage storm water.
- Changing the building program so the ground floor is full of active uses, incorporating wider sidewalks and making the parking more efficient are all very positive improvements. I am concerned that the building may still be too tall along Washington Street and that the façade needs to be better articulated. I am also not sure if egress onto River Road is appropriate.
- *Claremont: The building skin shown in the renderings is not finalized and will change. We are looking into different stone and masonry options.*
- The Committee is currently exploring opportunities for shared ramp access for a further development on the two neighboring parcels. Will the building design and fenestration accommodate this kind of concept and is that something that Claremont is considering? The Committee is also exploring opportunities for shared parking generally as a means of addressing the challenges with fitting parking on the site.
- *Claremont: The building is being designed to accommodate shared ramp access.*
- *Claremont: We are open to providing shared ramp access. Providing shared parking could be challenging as we feel like we are proposing the minimum number of parking spaces needed for guests, but it could also be mutually beneficial depending on the other use we would be sharing with.*
- The Committee has been modeling 20' first floor heights for the balance of the district, would a shared ramp still work if the first floor of the hotel is 20'?
- It could still work, but you would likely have to ramp up a bit more in the neighboring building.
- What kind of restaurant will the hotel have?

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- *Claremont: The proposal is for a Hilton Garden Inn which will have a bar/lounge, paid breakfast buffet and a paid tapas menu at dinner time. Both are open to the public. There is no lunch service.*
- I agree that the massing, double height floors and wider sidewalks are significant improvements over the previous proposal. I am also concerned about access onto River Road and I also think there should be a larger side yard setback from the vet parcel.
- I am open to providing vehicle access onto River Road as there are a number of pros and cons to consider with respect to car and pedestrian flow/safety. Requiring a setback at the northern end of the parcel next to the vet is inconsistent with allowing for shared ramp access so that may not be a good idea.
- Could the pickup/drop off area be moved inside of the building? That would eliminate some of the concerns about pedestrian safety.
- Where is the lot line on the River Road side of the parcel?
- *Claremont: The lot line follows the back side of the sidewalk.*
- Pervious pavement on River Road and the sidewalk are a great idea; breaking up the massing is a big improvement on the design. I am concerned about the sidewalk widths.
- *Claremont: The first floor is setback 4' from the back of the sidewalk so the sidewalks will be wider than they are now. The pickup/drop off area does not cross the sidewalk and there is a bump out by the entrance and exit to the parking so there will be minimal interaction between cars and pedestrians. Additionally, the drive lane for the garage is half of what it was in the previous proposal because of the changes to how cars enter/exit the building.*
- Having a separate entrance and exit for cars makes the driveway seem more residential.
- *Claremont: If River Road was made one way going north it would function similar to Webster Street by the Marriott in Coolidge Corner.*
- There are different scales to consider here: There is an Urban Scale along Washington Street, a local/urban scale on Brookline Ave and a pedestrian scale along River Road. Having larger massing on Washington Street is appropriate. Breaking up the massing along Brookline Ave and River Road is also appropriate. I would like to see if wider sidewalks can be incorporated along Washington Street as well as more street trees to soften the urban edge a little bit.
- After Gateway east is completed, there will be a cycle track running along Washington Street as well as a floating bus stop so the edge will be softened some already. Wider sidewalks are great, but there is only so much room to fit everything in that area.
- 12 cars entering/exiting the hotel during peak hours is de_minimis.
- This is not the Intercontinental hotel where there are a lot of people using the pick/up drop off area.
- The design of the River Road side of the building needs as much or more attention as the rest of the building.
- All of the changes to the design are positive and address a number of the areas of concern the Committee has been discussing with respect to massing, stepping the building down, efficient parking and minimizing impacts on pedestrians.

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- The architects should continue to study buildings in Brookline and the surrounding area to continue to push the design to be the best it can be.
- I agree that allowing egress on to River Road is an improvement in terms of parking efficiency and circulation. We should understand the impact of not allowing a similar configuration for future developments on the balance of the site.
- What is the projected construction timeline?
- *Claremont: A year to 18 months depending on how long permitting takes.*
- Could the garage that will eventually be built by Children's Hospital Across the street be used for parking?
- *Claremont: We feel like the number of spaces we have for hotel guests is as low as we could probably go.*
- Pam McKinney indicated that the Children's garage could serve as a convenient release valve for future developments that may need additional parking.
- *Claremont: The Institute of Transportation Engineers recommends around 1.3 parking spaces per room for this site, which is way too much. We are recommending a much lower ratio based on what other area hotels are providing.*
- The number of spaces is not the only metric. Utilization is a more accurate indicator of parking demand.
- *Claremont: The Coolidge Corner Marriott garage is full when the hotel is at 80% occupancy. Other area hotels are also full when their occupancy is lower.*
- Would Claremont consider using valet parking?
- *Claremont: This is something we would consider, but the problem is that there is no place to put the cars in the area. We continue to talk to Children's about their garage, but they are not able to make a long term commitment at the moment.*
- Much of the discussion today about parking in the hotel has not been about the number of spaces, but whether or not the design could accommodate a shared ramp scenario or shared parking for a neighboring use.

Public Comment/Questions:

- The sidewalk widths and changes to the first floor are great. I still think the building is too tall and that there needs to be more green and trees along Washington Street and River Road.
- It would be nice to have a restaurant that serves lunch.
- Where will services and trash be stored?
- I like the idea of narrowing River Road and widening the sidewalks.
- Articulation around the building especially along River road is critical.
- The buildings should be human scale.